The Failure of Algerian Reform
during the Popular Front:
Exploring the Ideological Debate
in the French Press
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A thesis submitted to the History Department
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
for Undergraduate Departmental Honors
Advised by Professor Temma Kaplan

New Brunswick, New Jersey
March 2010
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for their support and encouragement. My parents have been especially helpful, and their assistance in my research trip to Paris was critical. I must thank my brother Terrence and my high school history teacher Chris Messina, both of whom helped to spark my interest in history. The necessary research for this project would have been impossible without the effective teaching methods of two of my French teachers, Bénédicte Lebéhot and Professor Bombart. I am grateful to the Aresty foundation for providing me the funds for my trip to Paris, where the accommodating and helpful staff at the Bibliothèque nationale de France made for an effective and enjoyable research experience. The staff at Alexander Library was also helpful, especially in finding and sending articles I could not access myself. In terms of writing and editing, I must acknowledge the guidance and effective timelines of Professor Masschaele. My classmates have provided an enjoyable experience and a place to go to vent frustrations. I also thank Professor Hellbeck for taking the time to read and comment on the thesis.

Finally, a special thanks to my advisor Professor Kaplan, who pushed me from day one by proposing a trip to Paris, which was certainly beyond my ambitions at the time. Before the summer break, she also nudged me into studying Algeria, so that I was able to begin researching heavily the moment I came back. I am particularly grateful for her suggestion to look at colonial policy in the 1930s, a subject in which large unexplored areas still exist. Since then, she has provided valuable criticism and encouragement while putting up with my indecisiveness and inability to pin down central arguments. When the thesis hit a crisis moment, she helped steer me back in the right direction. This thesis would not have been at all possible without her help and guidance.
**Introduction**

When explaining the causes of the Algerian War (1954-1962), historiography often points to the failure of the French to enact colonial reform in 1937 as a lost opportunity. However, the reason for the failure is generally reduced to concerns about French values and identity. If we look more carefully at the press coverage in both Paris and Algeria, we can see that the debate over colonial reform placed Algerian issues in the greater context of an intense ideological struggle. Both left and right thought that their opponents planned to use Algeria to further their domestic agendas in France. Even worse, each side believed that foreign powers, whether Soviet Russia or Fascist Italy, were working to undermine French Algerian rule. In the atmosphere of the repeated crises of the 1930s, the French press constructed an image of an Algeria under siege by dangerous ideologies. Attempts at Algerian reform became impossible, since the exaggerated discourse convinced Parisian politicians that the stakes were too high. By examining the depictions of Algeria in the French press from 1936-1937, we can understand how easily issues became internationalized and exaggerated in the 1930s.

In May 1936, a coalition of French political parties that included the Radical moderates, the Socialists, and the Communists, won a decisive electoral victory. The Popular Front, as the coalition was known, embarked upon a wide array of reforms. One of the most ambitious of these was the attempt to change the French colonial structure. Since Algeria was the foremost French possession, and because the French considered Algeria to be part of France, the stakes of colonial reform there were particularly high. The French press, which played a large role in shaping political arguments during the Popular Front period, quickly created an Algerian discourse. Although Algeria had seen
several periods in which the French displayed an effort to further assimilate the country, or define its exact relationship to the métropole, the reforms initiated by the Popular Front marked the first time that Algeria held a central position in a political debate in France, and it swiftly became a battleground between the right and left.

Previous discussions concerning Algeria revolved around ideas of assimilation, co-existence, and exclusion. This debate interested legal experts who attempted to demarcate who was French, who was on the way to becoming French, and what certain people needed to do to be considered French. Much of French-Algerian history can be charted by demonstrating the slow extension of full French citizenship to different segments of the population. The Cremieux Decree of 1870 awarded Algerian Jews full citizenship and permitted them to follow their religious customs and laws. However, the French were unwilling to grant citizenship to Muslims governed by local Koranic law, known as the personal status, since it supported polygamy and strict inheritance laws. Only those Muslims who dropped their adherence to the personal status could become citizens. Since only a few Muslims did so, the French ideal of assimilation made little progress, and Muslim elites became frustrated with the status-quo. The Socialist Maurice Viollette attempted to break the impasse in a bill that proposed making 20,000-25,000 Muslims full citizens without requiring any change to the personal status. The potential

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candidates were limited to decorated veterans, graduates of advanced French schools, civil servants, and political representatives.³

Despite its limited range, the Viollette Bill launched a vociferous debate between the right and left. After the Popular Front’s assumption of power in June 1936, the repercussions of massive social change in France engulfed Algeria. A previously quiet Algeria was suddenly rocked by a series of strikes, demands from the Muslim leaders, and political demonstrations that often ended in bloodshed. Events in Algeria convinced both right and left that their opponents had dangerous goals. The left believed that the Algerian right displayed overtly fascist tendencies. The right thought that the Communists of the Popular Front were gravely weakening French control over its most important colony. As a result, when the Popular Front leader, Léon Blum, advanced the Viollette Bill in late December 1936, Algeria was already a battleground between the right and left.

The Forging of the Popular Front

In order to understand the basic contours of this political struggle, we must briefly review the events leading up to the Popular Front, and consider the specific issues that divided the right and left. Political stability in France suffered in the 1930s as a result of the Great Depression. Thanks to the conservative fiscal policy of President of the Council Raymond Poincaré in the late 1920s, the American crash did not immediately shake the French economy. However, the initial joy of having escaped a worldwide economic crisis quickly began to evaporate as the French economy began to sputter.⁴ As a result, the French economy continued to collapse while the rest of the world began to recover. The

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French situation was all the more bitter because they attributed their earlier prosperity to French values of hard work, sacrifice, and refusal to speculate. French politicians found it difficult to respond to the crisis. In 1929 and 1932, the conservative André Tardieu experimented with a crude government stimulus plan that was underfunded and quickly abandoned. Worse still, Tardieu claimed that his policies would bring universal prosperity. The hopes he raised made his failure all the more disappointing. Pierre Laval was the next leader to confront the economic problem. A wily politician steadily moving further and further towards the right, Laval attempted to resolve the issue through extensive deflation in 1935. Between Tardieu and Laval’s governments, attempts by the Radicals (a misleading name for the moderate party) and Socialists also failed to turn the country around. All parties raised tariffs to protect key sectors like agriculture. The increasing reliance on protectionism was not capable of dealing with such an unprecedented economic crisis.

As the politicians struggled, parliamentary politics became discredited. Right-wing movements gained momentum in the aftermath of the Stavisky scandal of December 1933. Alexandre Stavisky was a Russian immigrant who became a French citizen in 1920 and proceeded to concoct financial scams through his connections to important politicians. In 1933, a government supported operation of Stavisky’s in Bayonne was discredited, and when Stavisky went down, the politicians who helped him followed. The right portrayed Stavisky as a corrupt outsider (and a Jew no less) who, in

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8 Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de la France au XXe siècle*, 102-104.
league with the shameless Radicals, provided a prime example of how foreigners had supplanted Frenchmen in control of the Republic. Far-right militant groups, encouraged by a bitter Tardieu and an infuriated press,\(^9\) gathered at the Place de la Concorde on February 6, 1934. At night, violence broke out, leaving 15 dead and over 2,000 wounded.

The left immediately began to mobilize and unite to oppose the “fascist” threat. Lacking a strong leader or any specific plans to overthrow the government, the right nevertheless terrified the Deputies, who waited nervously across the Seine in the Chamber. Édouard Daladier, the Radical President of the Council, stepped down, and a weak conservative government took power.

The Croix-de- feu (Cross of Fire, CDF), was the most important of the right-wing groups to mobilize on February 6.\(^{10}\) Although originally an association of World War I veterans, the Croix-de-feu, under the leadership of François de La Rocque, became the most influential militant group on the right. For the former supporters of the traditional right, the CDF promised adherence to patriotism and Catholicism. For those disgusted with the status-quo (and there were many), La Rocque’s organization promoted social change and criticized both the decadent parliamentary system and the exploitative aspects of capitalism. By 1936, it could claim 600,000 members with almost a million a year later.\(^{11}\) When the Popular Front dissolved the militant leagues, La Rocque reconstituted the CDF as a more traditional political party, the Parti Social Français (PSF). La Rocque understood this popularity meant that illegal action was too risky. As a result, he acted as a defender of the Republic. In this context, his hesitancy to act directly on February 6th

\(^{10}\) Bernstein, *Le 6 Février 1934*, 62.
suited the goals of the CDF. But the left, caught up in the whirl of events, viewed La Rocque as France’s Mussolini or Hitler.

The left feared that the February 6 riots indicated a fascist threat to the Republic and began to unify. The fall of the Weimar Republic to the Nazis in 1933 had already placed the French left on high alert. After February 6, long-standing differences between leftist parties suddenly appeared inconsequential. The only potential problem lay with the French Communist Party (PCF), which, following previous Comintern policy, depicted Socialists as “social-fascists”. The moderate Radical party left Laval’s government when deflation failed. The Radicals, Socialists, and Communists, who ceased their attacks on other leftists, created a coalition for the elections of May 1936. The inability of the right to coalesce and the leftist desire to deny the right any more power led to a massive electoral victory for the Popular Front coalition. The Communists, who won 12 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 1932, won 72 in 1936. The Socialist party, the SFIO (French Section of the Workers’ International), went from 129 to 146 seats, while the Radicals still managed to hold on to 115 seats. Although the PCF and SFIO made significant gains, the Radicals still held enough seats to dictate policy, since their departure would place the PCF and SFIO in the minority. Nevertheless, the Socialists held the most power, and their leader, Léon Blum, became President of the Council.

Blum was faced with a precarious situation. The Socialists had never previously controlled the government. The Radicals had dominated in all the earlier leftist coalitions, leaving the Socialists in the comfortable position of advising without sacrificing doctrinal purity. Now the Socialists would run the country for the first time, and the excitement

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among optimistic leftists put enormous pressure on Blum the moment he assumed power.\textsuperscript{14} A series of mass sit-down strikes broke out in France, since workers were confident that the Popular Front would force employers to grant long-desired concessions. Blum knew that France was in no position to undergo any sort of radical change when militant groups of youth offered strong support to the domestic opposition. Moreover, Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 and the Nazi militarization of the Rhineland in March 1936 created a delicate international situation. Fortunately for Blum, there would be little pressure from the Communists, who were content with moderate reforms designed to prevent a fascist takeover of France.\textsuperscript{15}

The elections may have dealt the moderate right a blow, but the radical right thrived in the new atmosphere. Although disunited, the right wing leagues responsible for February 6 could now charge the leftists with designs on the Republic. Despite the rather moderate aims of the Popular Front, the rightists viewed its ascension to power as a revolutionary takeover. As a result, the far-right viciously attacked every Popular Front measure.\textsuperscript{16} Whenever possible, the right reminded the French that the PCF’s recent decision to play by the rules was temporary. By cultivating the fear of communism, the right hoped to shatter the unity of the government. Since the Radicals and the SFIO had long been wary of the PCF, the rightists expected this strategy to work. The CDF-PSF and its more authentically fascist rival and sometime ally, the Parti Populaire Français

\textsuperscript{14} Joel Colton, \textit{Léon Blum} (Paris: Fayard, 1966), 139-140.
\textsuperscript{15} Herrick Chapman, \textit{State Capitalism and Working-Class Radicalism in the French Aircraft Industry} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 88. Thorez called off the initial strike wave to make sure that the PCF did not alienate the rest of the country. His quote, “It is necessary to know how to end a strike when the goals have been obtained”, was the clearest statement of the PCF’s moderate policy.
\textsuperscript{16} Irvine argues that the CDF/PSF had many pro-Popular Front members, but his evidence is the opinions of the radical members who wanted social change, but who must have opposed the way the Popular Front went about it, since they were in the CDF/PSF. He also cites La Rocque as saying that the PCF’s presence was a good thing, since it kept traditional centers of power off balance, which hardly qualifies as support for leftist policies. Irvine, “Fascism in France”, 283-284.
PPF), led by the former Communist Jacques Doriot, sought to attract working class people to the right through promises of orderly social change according to a nationalist program. In Algeria, the CDF-PSF and PPF targeted both the urban poor and the entire Muslim population as potentially fruitful groups to recruit. The growing success of these parties among the working class meant a corresponding loss of PCF influence.

The PCF understood that the SFIO and Radicals did not entirely trust them, and did everything they could to maintain their new image. Their most effective means of helping to keep the Popular Front unified was to focus on the issue of anti-fascism. The mutual interest in attacking each other pushed the extreme right and left into ideological debates over every issue. To add to the tension, each side used foreign examples—the fall of Weimar Germany for the left, and the growing violence in Spain for both the right and left—of what might befall France if their opponents came to power. Nothing did more to provoke furious debate about Algeria than the French press that played a huge role in connecting Algerian and Popular Front politics.

The centrality of newspapers to political disputes provoked popular demonstrations and battles in the streets, including physical attacks on street vendors. In December 1935, such street violence led Georges Faucon, head of the CDF in Algiers, to discontinue public sale of Le Flambeau since vendors had suffered too many violent attacks. Shortly afterward, he punished three of his own followers who had attacked the vendors of the SFIO’s Le Populaire. In February 1937, the PCF denounced the rightists

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18 Sean Kennedy, Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix-de-Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 62. Perhaps as many as 10 percent of CDF members in Algeria were Muslims.
19 Albert Kéchichian, Les Croix-de-feu à l’âge des fascismes : travail, famille, patrie (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2006), 315. Le Flambeau was the central organ of the CDF.
of Sidi-Bel-Abbès for firing on a popular demonstration. The crowd gathered because militants, backed up by PPF thugs from Marseille, had attacked vendors of the PCF’s paper, L’Humanité. These examples of violence highlight the role of the press in mobilizing both the right and left.

The Role of the French Press

The French press may have been the single most important factor shaping public opinion in the 1930s. For the first time, readers were presented with up-to-date information from around the world in an accessible manner. Yet, the information was almost always biased towards a specific political agenda. Every major political party ran a major newspaper along with numerous provincial dailies. The independent newspapers claimed to play an informational role, but in reality advanced the ideological agendas of their owners. As a result, most newspapers aimed not as much to inform opinion, but to shape it. Since large readership meant not only profit but political power, it was important to attract as many readers as possible. The history of the PCF’s major newspaper, L’Humanité, provides a case in point.

For the Communists, remaining competitive with other newspapers required a certain amount of ideological sacrifice. As Henri Noguères, an editor for the SFIO’s Le Populaire remembered, the main leftist papers “ceased to be the internal organs of the Communist and Socialist parties” when the Popular Front came to power. In an article about the intellectuals who wrote for L’Humanité, Annie Burger-Roussennac charts some of the decisions that lifted the newspaper out of the obscurity it occupied before the

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advent of the Popular Front. Paul Vaillant-Couturier greatly reformed the newspaper while serving as editor in chief from 1926 to 1929 and 1935 to 1937. Although some party members wanted the paper to be a journal written exclusively for the PCF’s proletarian followers, Vaillant-Couturier preferred the use of photos and cartoons that might appeal to both working-class and middle-class readers. He also clearly delineated sections and hired well-educated and informed writers.22 One of the sections, “In the Colonies”, dealt primarily with Algeria. While the front page covered breaking news stories from Algeria, “In the Colonies” considered everyday life and continuing trends. Though not everyone was happy with the paper’s broad appeal, the PCF’s commitment to the Popular Front strengthened Vaillant-Couturier’s attempt to attract the widest possible audience. Thanks to its newfound accessibility, L’Humanité could boast a daily readership of 350,000 in 1936.23

As a mouthpiece for the PCF, L’Humanité promoted Comintern views.24 But businessmen, with their own political and cultural concerns, ran most of the other newspapers. The whims of the owner, his political associates, and financial concerns all played a role in shaping the news. Editors had few scruples in distorting or falsifying facts or characterizing their opponents in order to make a story more sensational. For the right-wing press, the common political target was the Communist Party.25

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25 A good example is provided by Eugen Weber, who cites a correspondent for Le Matin, who found proof that the assassin of President Paul Doumer, Paul Gorguloff, had planned to kill numerous prominent
Le Petit Journal from 1932 to 1938 shows how the intermingling of politics and business could shape the content of a newspaper.

Although Le Petit Journal was one of the most popular Parisian newspapers before World War I, it became outdated in the post-war era, and was soon surpassed by those papers that catered to more modern tastes. In 1932, two industrialists interested in building up a network of papers acquired the newspaper. Raymond Patenôtre, who also owned several local journals, ran the revamped paper. Elected Deputy of Rambouillet in 1928, Patenôtre had built his influence by acquiring provincial papers and political connections. In 1931 he bought Pierre Laval’s paper, Lyon Républicain, which established a relationship between the two that was tested when Laval took power in 1935. In 1932, Patenôtre became Undersecretary of State of the National Economy thanks to his relations with the Radical Édouard Daladier. With political associations and control of several press outlets, Patenôtre was well equipped to play an influential role in the mid 1930s.

Although Patenôtre was forced to resign as Minister after the February 6 riots, he gained complete control of Le Petit Journal that summer. The new director was quick to repay Laval by supporting the conservative’s bid to turn around the French economy.

Le Petit Journal’s tireless support for Laval even extended to Italy, since Laval attempted to improve relations with France’s Fascist neighbor. The pro-Italian campaign was a

28 Kupferman and Machefer, “Presse et politique”, 14. Any criticism of Laval was out of the question at the time, as indicated by the title of one column advocating his beliefs and character; “If France required a dictator, who would you choose?”
success: in a readers’ poll of how France should respond to the invasion of Ethiopia, 530,000 out of 847,000 opted for absolute neutrality and only 8,237 for armed intervention. Yet with the failure of Laval’s deflationary policies, Patenôtre began to reverse his political views, which was soon reflected in *Le Petit Journal*.²⁹

While the economy provided Patenôtre with his initial justification for leaving the right, issues that went beyond practicality soon brought him to advance the interests of the Popular Front. When Blum dissolved the militant right-wing leagues, many conservative papers saw a new threat to liberty, yet Patenôtre came to the defense of the government. By the end of 1936, he had reversed his Italian position and now called for an alliance with the Soviet Union. To cement the status of the Popular Front as a patriotic movement, he launched an influential series entitled “Are We Defended?” that warned of the ring of fascist states enclosing France. After buying the weekly *Marianne*, Patenôtre hired the leftist Lucien Vogel to run *Le Petit Journal*. This final commitment to the left drove out the older rightist writers. Meanwhile, Patenôtre attracted the ire of the right when he assisted Vaillant-Couturier in the establishment of *Ce Soir*, a new PCF newspaper.³⁰

The Popular Front supporters were shocked when Patenôtre sold *Le Petit Journal* to a bank with connections to La Rocque’s PSF in late June 1937. The decision was all the more surprising because Patenôtre was in the process of discussing a deal to sell the paper to the Socialist/Communist union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). On Bastille Day, the paper officially came out as the new mouthpiece of the largest radical right wing party in France. Patenôtre’s sale effectively turned one of the Popular

²⁹ Kupferman and Machefer, “Presse et politique”, 14-21.
³⁰ Kupferman and Machefer, “Presse et politique”, 21-25.
Front’s most effective newspapers into a bitter enemy.  Whatever the motivations behind the sale were, *Le Petit Journal* provided the PSF its first national outlet. Since most local PSF papers were concerned with the actions and meetings of the nearby party (league) members, the national paper gave La Rocque the chance to cast a wider political net and to centralize the party’s distribution of information. *Le Petit Journal* thus became a vehicle to spread the PSF’s ideology in a manner that appealed to the middle class.

Unfortunately for La Rocque, the paper’s influence never equaled that of *L’Humanité*. At the time of the sale, *Le Petit Journal* sold around 156,000 copies a day, a number which fell dramatically by 1939.  The failure of La Rocque’s ambition to create a national party paper has been attributed to the fact that the provincial PSF organs already fulfilled all the needs of the party members and supporters. Another factor may have been that the market was saturated with right-wing newspapers. The lack of economic and social stability at home and the threat of the Bolsheviks abroad convinced many of the industrialists and businessmen who owned papers that the existing order had to be defended. As a result, the “information” press began to openly support both domestic and foreign right-wing

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31 Kupferman and Machefer, “Presse et politique”, 25, 33-39. Although it is impossible to discern his exact motivations, there are several explanations for the sale. The paper was not doing well, and there may be some truth to Patenôtre’s argument that he needed to dump the paper and that the CGT simply could not afford to purchase the paper. However, the General Secretary of the CGT claimed that Patenôtre assured him just before the sale that the CGT would have time to prepare for the transaction. The most convincing answer, given Patenôtre’s political commitments, was that he wanted to avoid giving the paper to the CGT because the Popular Front was already waning and his friend, the Radical Daladier, was preparing for a more centrist government that viewed the CGT as a potential opponent. As Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar point out, Patenôtre may have also been encouraged by a growing disillusionment with the left. *Marianne* was turned into a photo based magazine devoid of serious coverage, and in 1940 its owner was quick to support Vichy for its “revolutionary” aspects. Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 74.

movements. The range of political coverage also expanded to include topics rarely touched upon before World War I, such as demonstrations and cases of political violence.\textsuperscript{33} Two of the other newspapers utilized in this study, \textit{Le Matin} and \textit{Le Figaro}, were informational in principle, but often advocated rightist political positions.

Until World War I, the Parisian press tended to dominate the smaller provincial papers, but the latter became more successful in the interwar years. Nevertheless, national news that originated in Paris continued to heavily influence the provincial press, since the local papers often reprinted Parisian articles and editorials.\textsuperscript{34} As a result, the hostile political debates in Paris spread throughout the nation. The Parisian newspapers, copying American correspondent networks, sent reporters throughout France and Europe, who sent provincial political news back to Paris.\textsuperscript{35} Events from the provinces, colonies, and foreign countries were therefore quickly incorporated into the Parisian political debates and filtered through to the rest of the country, making Paris the heart of a circulatory system of information.

Eugen Weber, Pierre Milza, and Serge Bernstein, who have framed debates about the French press, have commented on its contribution to the heightened political antagonisms of 1930s France.\textsuperscript{36} Never before was it so easy for a large proportion of the populace to follow domestic and international events. Yet the highly ideological cast of almost all French newspapers made anything like balanced reporting nearly impossible. As a result, people were better informed, but directed toward radical opinions through

\textsuperscript{33} Bellanger et al., \textit{Histoire Générale de la Presse Française}, 479, 484-485.
\textsuperscript{34} Peter J. Larmour, \textit{The Radical Party in the 1930s} (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1964), 57-58.
\textsuperscript{35} Bernstein and Milza, \textit{Histoire de la France au XXe siècle}, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{36} Weber, \textit{The Hollow Years}, 129-131; Bernstein and Milza, \textit{Histoire de la France au XXe siècle}, 77.
manipulation. Since readers had little to no prior knowledge of most subjects, the press often had the opportunity to greatly shape public opinion. Algeria is a revealing example.

Until the Colonial Exposition of 1931 that drew eight million visitors, Algeria and France’s other colonies received very little press attention. Even after the Exposition, interest in the colonies quickly dwindled. Most French men and women had a little or no idea about what life was like in Algiers, let alone about the problems of agricultural laborers on the outskirts of Oran. But in 1936 when the Popular Front opened up the possibility of re-defining the French Empire, these issues became important and gained a fair amount of press coverage. Many editorials began by pointing out how little the French know about Algerian affairs. Such statements gave the subsequent explanations greater weight, even though the descriptions often conformed to the general political beliefs of the paper. Therefore, what many read about Algeria in the press, combined with the occasional film or fictional narrative set in North Africa, formed the entirety of their knowledge.

Since the provincial press played an increasingly large part in shaping national discourses, it is important to examine the French Algerian press. Thanks to Jonathan Gosnell’s book *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria*, the role of newspapers in Algeria has become much clearer. As Gosnell points out, the French Algerian newspapers catered to the desire of colonists, known as *colons*, to assert their French identity. The front page often reported French rather than Algerian stories. Daily coverage, including weather reports, focused on Paris. The *colons*’ fear of a threat to Algeria emanating

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from Popular Front policies and beliefs intensified their obsession with France, and especially with Paris. Participation in the Popular Front debate contributed to the *colons'* insistence on being an integral part of France. However, to be important in national issues, local Algerian news had to be depicted as part of the French Popular Front conflict.

In 1936, with the beginning of a series of strikes in Algeria, the front page became a vehicle to denounce leftist agitation in Algeria. A short period of local calm allowed the paper to resume its mission of connecting the Algerians with France, but disorder at home was not neglected. In fact, as Gosnell points out, the question of the Popular Front provided French Algerian papers the opportunity to call for French unity in rejecting the Popular Front in favor of the right wing parties that were calling for an end to political division in France.\textsuperscript{39} And while Gosnell argues that the leftist press in Algeria displayed the varying political beliefs of French Algerians, the rightist press in Algeria preferred to depict the French Algerians as united in their opposition to the Popular Front and in their support for a strong France. Therefore, emphasis on events in Algeria as crucial to the stability of France provided the *colons* with further evidence that French Algerians were truly French.

Gosnell describes how “Over the course of the twentieth century, the competing claims for influence in North Africa intensified. The content of Algerian newspapers reveals some of the forces vying with France for authority in colonial North Africa.”\textsuperscript{40} Although this statement refers more to the leftist/Algerian press that called the colonial structure into question, it is clear that during the Popular Front, the colonial establishment

\textsuperscript{39} Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness*, 84-85.

\textsuperscript{40} Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness*, 77.
attempted to draw a line in the sand against further Parisian interference in their affairs. Their primary newspapers constituted a powerful means to broadcast their views and help their campaign to maintain the Algerian status-quo against the wishes of several government leaders and many Algerians. The two most influential French Algerian papers in shaping the Algerian debate were *L’Echo d’Oran* and *La Dépêche Algérienne*.

*L’Echo d’Oran* was founded in 1844 and by 1936, with daily sales of 80,000 copies, was probably the most influential paper in Algeria.41 Oran’s 400,000 Europeans (almost half of all Europeans in Algeria) made it a political stronghold for the colonists. In 1936 the mayor of Oran, the Abbot Gabriel Lambert, led the Rassemblement national d’action social (National Group of Social Action, RNAS), a party unifying Algerian right-wing movements. Through the RNAS, Lambert exercised a massive influence on the colons’ campaign against the Popular Front. While *L’Echo d’Oran* was moderately conservative and less likely than *La Dépêche Algérienne* to use provocative language, it had no qualms in allowing Lambert to use their third page as a space for his declarations, letters, and public discourses. In the days leading up to Lambert’s much hyped Bastille Day march to send a message to the newly elected Popular Front, the paper told its readers what time to show up and where to go (with a giant map to guide demonstrators).42 While such advertisements for political demonstrations and rallies were commonplace in *L’Humanité*, their appearance in an “informational” magazine reveals the lack of hesitation on the part of *L’Echo d’Oran* to partake in the attack on the Popular Front.

42 *L’Echo d’Oran*, July 12-13, 1936.
La Dépêche Algérienne went much further in its reaction to the Popular Front. Founded in 1885 and selling between 50,000 to 70,000 copies a day in the early 20th century, La Dépêche became the primary paper of the conservative colons in Algiers, which had a European population of around 360,000 in 1936. Its editors and writers, who militantly attacked almost every measure taken by the government, feared and fought against the Popular Front. Like L’Echo d’Oran, La Dépêche covered the meetings and demonstrations of local right wing groups, while brushing aside leftist demonstrations. Whenever possible, the paper proclaimed its unbiased nature and its carefully balanced coverage. Although some effort was made to give the opposition some space, the clear favoritism towards the right coupled with an endless stream of scathing anti-Popular Front editorials made such claims seem increasingly absurd. The paper, which heavily supported the Vichy government, did not survive World War II. Once a moderate paper, La Dépêche’s decision to latch on to extreme right wing views in order to oppose the Popular Front led to disaster.

L’Echo d’Oran and La Dépêche Algérienne, like other provincial papers, frequently reprinted Parisian editorials and articles. However, they especially favored articles that concerned Algeria. That does not mean that the Algerian colons lacked a voice, since there were many articles by local politicians and journalists. The issue of reproducing Parisian articles is all the more confusing since the colons often claimed to know far more about Algeria than those residing in the métropole. A tentative proposition can be advanced. Since the colons looked to Paris with reverence, they were eager to know what the Parisians thought of Algeria. The colons may have also felt comforted by the support of the Parisian press. If the two agreed on the Algerian issue, surely the only

supporters of reform were the radical revolutionary leftists. Depicting Algeria as the center of a national debate allowed the *colons* to believe they affected the political fortunes of metropolitan France. The same connection between the provincial and Parisian press that had developed in France occurred in Algeria, though with more intensity given the greater physical separation. As a result, inclusion of Parisian articles on the Algerian question continued the process of tightening the relationship between *métropole* and colony.

**The Algerian Debate**

By following the newspaper coverage of Algeria from June 1936 to late 1937, one can track how the Viollette Bill became entangled in Popular Front issues that divided rightists from leftists. This study is split into four chapters, each addressing a different set of issues containing elements pertaining to the mixture of Algerian and Popular Front issues. The first chapter examines notions of race and anti-Semitism, how French and Algerian ideas of these concepts intersected, and how they affected the Algerian political debate. The second chapter focuses on how rightists responded to Popular Front reform by advocating economic and social improvements framed in traditional imperialist terms. Chapter Three reveals how public demonstrations of political allegiances, often borrowed from Popular Front culture, created a tense atmosphere. Finally, the overarching fears of Communist and Fascist plots against France and Algeria will be examined in the fourth chapter.
Chapter One: Racism and Anti-Semitism

During the Popular Front, both France and Algeria faced problems of racism and anti-Semitism. Since the French were a minority in Algeria, political opinions were always partially based upon racial fears. The Dreyfus Affair had also established a strong current of anti-Semitism in Algeria. In interwar France, both racism and anti-Semitism subsided until the depression. In fact, French losses in the war necessitated a large-scale influx of foreign immigrants, and by 1931, there were over 100,000 North African immigrant workers. Continually high unemployment eventually made the rightist motto “La France aux Français” popular as xenophobia set in. Similarly, the anti-Semitic right gained traction with the Stavisky affair and the depiction of the “revolutionary” Popular Front as a foreign plot led by the Jewish Léon Blum. When the Algerian right argued that Algerian reform was dangerous on racial grounds, they spoke to a receptive audience. The right effectively associated Popular Front reform with racial and Jewish threats.

Algeria in the 1930s was a country of many ethnicities. The main groups were Arabs, Berbers, Jews, and Europeans. Whereas most French colonies had small French populations, the community in Algeria was quite large. The one million European Algerians were generally poorer than French citizens living in the métropole, though a few had sizeable fortunes derived from large scale farming worked by poorly paid Algerian laborers known as fellahs. By 1936, the colons’ control of local governance was

45 Samuel Kalman, The Extreme Right in Interwar France: The Faisceau and the Croix-de-Feu (Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 228.
firmly established thanks to the traditional lack of concern over colonial questions in France and the limited political capital of unstable government coalitions that saw no benefit in colonial reform. The *colons* population included many descendants of Spanish, Italian, and Maltese immigrants who had come to Algeria in the late 1800’s.  

48 Half of Oran’s population descended from Spanish immigrants, while Spanish could still be heard in the city’s poorer European districts. Most of the six million Arabs and Berbers, who the French referred to as *indigènes*, resided in the countryside. Even by 1954, 70% of the population was rural.  

50 However, there was a steady movement of the *indigènes* into the cities. 1936 was the first year in which the urban Muslim population size equaled that of the Europeans. Whether urban or rural, the Arabs and Berbers generally lived in extreme poverty and had little to no political organization, especially in the countryside.  

52 There was, however, a small group of educated and influential Muslims whose success had been largely contingent upon their acceptance of French language and culture. Political involvement was an attractive prospect for these men, for they believed in Republican ideals of assimilation. A few of the politically active *indigènes* turned to nationalism and advocated the end of the colonial system.

The primary anxiety among the *colons* was the sheer number of *indigènes*. The fear of ideologies was accentuated, or even born out of this nervousness. Communism, Algerian nationalism, and Pan-Arabism threatened French hegemony because their biggest pillar of support would be the Muslims. As long as the *colons* dominated Algeria

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52 Stora “Faiblesse”, 62.
politically, the large numbers of indigènes did not pose a severe threat. However, the thought that millions could be mobilized by these ideologies put the colony’s future in question. But the issue of demographics had taken on new aspects with the development of Nazi ideology. Although the traditional racial views still prevailed, biological and scientific racism justified stricter measures of population control. Demographics thus mixed with racism to bolster the colons’ claims. A popular trend was to extrapolate current patterns far into the future in order to confirm the fear that the whites would eventually be overrun by the greater number of other races. These demographic concerns formed a key foundation for the arguments against electoral reform.

New Algerian census results in 1936 provided the press with accurate numbers with which to work. Algeria had a population of 973,174 Europeans and 6,248,680 Muslims. When reporting on the figures, La Dépêche Algérienne claimed that the increase in both numbers from the last census was a sign of the vitality of Algeria. La Dépêche also commented on how the numbers displayed how successfully the French had “enriched” themselves through inter-marrying with other Europeans. Apparently, many of the readers objected to the idea that the Spanish and Italians were equal to the French; a week later, an editorial by Jules Rouanet had to defend La Dépêche’s earlier claim, saying that a healthy, Latin mixture among French and non-French colons created a stronger population. Furthermore, Rouanet argued that these non-French colons had proved themselves in World War I. The efforts of Rouanet display the racism that French colons directed towards the other Europeans. Although the extreme racists argued that the French were superior to the other Europeans, others used the diversity of Algeria as a

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rhetorical tool. Gabriel Lambert, the rightist mayor of Oran, appealed to his Spanish supporters when he pointed out that the mixture of Spanish and French blood would shield Oran from Popular Front measures: “You have tried to introduce your poison into Algerian blood; we are of a solid temperament. The sons of the crusaders united with the sons of the conquistadors do not know fear”. Such statements were typical of Lambert, who represented the epitome of the Algerian far right. Like La Rocque in France, Lambert wielded considerable local power, and supported legality and the Republic while advocating or condoning the idea of violence if it were necessary. Lambert also saw himself as a social reformer, who bettered the lives of the French, Spanish, and indigènes of Oran. The conservative Le Figaro, careful to dissociate itself with elements that smelled of fascism, called Lambert “a monk in the mould of a warrior” and a source of troubles in Algeria because of Oran’s large Spanish population, which was portrayed as unstable due to the Spanish Civil War.

Racial definitions could be quite arbitrary. René Martial, a professor at L’Institute d’hygiene de la Faculté de Medecine, discussed the issue of naturalizing immigrants in an interview in Le Petit Journal. Martial was France’s pre-eminent advocate of using biologically determined categories of race to control the content of French blood. In his interview with the Popular Front supporting newspaper, Martial attacked Nazi policies and argued that mixing races was an effective means to improve a country. However, he clarified his point by saying that only races of quality mixed well, which included all

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54 L’Echo d’Oran, “La République est en danger” July 21, 1936.
Europeans and even Berbers, who “must not be confused with the Arabs”.\textsuperscript{57} Since \textit{Le Petit Journal} was run by Lucien Vogel’s left wing staff at the time, the printing of Martial’s opinions demonstrate the wide-spread acceptance of such views across the political spectrum. When La Rocque took over \textit{Le Petit Journal} in July 1936, the references to races justified French domination. In an article entitled “Les Imposteurs”, Paul Creyssel, Deputy from the Loire, wrote, “Algeria to the Algerians! Which Algerians? The Arabs? The Vandals? The Romans? The Phoenicians? Of these successive conquerors, which will be judged legitimate?”\textsuperscript{58} Creyssel’s argument called into question the formation of a non-European national myth while ignoring those of Western countries. Since Creyssel implied that no ethnicity was in a position to rule Algeria, the reader assumed that the duty therefore fell to the French. By pointing out the absurdity of “Algeria to the Algerians”, he consequently defined the rightist motto “France to the French” as the preserve of the superior white race.

The colonial press was even more direct in its insistence on the incapability of the \textit{indigènes} to govern Algeria, or indeed, share in any real responsibility. In \textit{La Dépêche Algérienne}, a local lawyer revealed the \textit{colons’} contempt for the \textit{indigènes} when he wrote an editorial opposing the presence of Muslim representatives in the Chamber of Deputies:

> Illiterate in all languages, including Arabic, what they know the best is that they know nothing, outside of village quarrels and the majestic wearing of the turban and burnoose on the day of a banquet. Is this the class of human specimens that we want to exhibit in Paris? No! Not that! Then we are not talking about parliamentary representation, but rather a zoological park where students from the capital have the chance to come, under the guidance of their professors, and perfect their knowledge of natural history. If that is the result to be reached, I will applaud with all my heart this progress for its dedication to science.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Le Petit Journal}, “Racisme ou métissage?” March 9, 1937.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Le Petit Journal}, “Les Imposteurs” August 5, 1937.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{La Dépêche Algérienne}, “Répräsentation parlementaire des indigènes” June 3, 1936.
The comparison of Arabs in Paris to exotic caged animals echoes the thoughtless placement of the Colonial Exposition held in Paris in 1931 next to a zoo.\textsuperscript{60} And although this tirade was followed up by an attempt to portray the indigènes as French because of their experiences in World War I, the article claims that equality can only be attained through complete assimilation. His depiction, however, left little hope for assimilation. Others used strict definitions to determine what constituted a civilized people. Raymond Cartier stressed in \textit{L’Echo de Paris} that a modern economy required a certain degree of planning and technocrats to do the work. Cartier argued that “in the class of indigènes called evolved [the colons’ term for assimilated indigènes], there is not a shade of the social categories needed to begin taking over the role played by the French. There are doctors, lawyers, too many business agents, and some journalists. But engineers? Technicians? Administrators? Astronomers? There are none.”\textsuperscript{61} If France was one step ahead of Algeria, it could always justify stinginess with political rights. Incidentally, Cartier later joined Raymond Aron during the Algerian War to argue that Algeria was incapable of becoming French, and therefore should be left to its own devices.\textsuperscript{62}

Once the Blum-Viollette Bill was introduced, the question of race became more urgent for the colons. The proposed granting of citizenship to over 20,000 indigènes threatened the colons’ position as a dominant minority. Without hesitation, the colons began to cry out that the bill would result in racial war. The not so subtle implication was that if the bill passed, ever greater numbers of Muslims would demand and be given the

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\textsuperscript{60} Andrew and Ungar, \textit{Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture}, 306.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{L’Echo de Paris}, as reprinted in \textit{L’Echo d’Oran}, “Si la France perd l’Algérie c’est qu’elle le voudra bien” February 2, 1937.
\textsuperscript{62} Shepard, \textit{The Invention of Decolonization}, 68.
\end{flushright}
right to vote, eventually forcing the *colons* to take matters into their own hands. *La Dépêche* applauded Lambert for “going straight to the heart of the subject with a striking definition” when he said the bill “is the gravest crisis that has ever menaced Algeria since the conquest. The *colons*’ spirit is such that it cannot envisage anything more than this alternative: civil war or the French pushed into the sea.”

André Mallarmé, a moderate Deputy from Algiers, asked what would happen to the *colons*, and particularly how the isolated farmers would protect themselves against violent confrontations. For *La Dépêche*’s editorialist Armand Lemoine, the best way to cure Algeria’s problems was through an increase in the French population, which he claimed was falling because of the hostile atmosphere. Proof of such a claim was not only lacking, but was in direct conflict with *La Dépêche*’s earlier celebration of the vitality of Algeria’s European population.

Viollette declared in the SFIO’s *Le Populaire* that the *colons*’ opposition to electoral reform was “simply a question of racial pride” since several other colonies had allowed the *indigènes* to vote. The *colons* responded by adding nuances to their argument. Some politicians spoke of the Arabs and Berbers as gullible, apathetic, and lacking in political aspirations. In July 1936, Mallarmé tried taking the blame for the strike wave off the *indigènes* and claimed that they “only understand authority and, I will add, love to feel authority around them.” As proof, he cited the arrival of a Parisian journal in Algiers that included a portrait of Hitler. The *indigènes* allegedly began to post

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64 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Ce que deviendraient les colons algériens avec certains projets du Front populaire” December 11, 1936.
65 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Vérité, viens au secours de la France” February 14, 1937.
the portrait in their homes because they believed Hitler to be a strong leader. The Mayor of Algiers, Augustin Rozis, argued that he loved the *indigènes*, who just wanted better lives, but who were gullible victims of Popular Front propaganda. Rozis’ statement derived from his fear of the association of the *indigènes* with the Popular Front. Elected Mayor in May 1935, Rozis was an “overt admirer of European fascism” and a Croix-de-feu member who attacked any effort of the Popular Front to aid the *indigènes*. Rozis displayed his fear of the left to Albert Camus before the May 1936 elections when he banned a play Camus co-wrote about the Spanish miner’s revolt in Asturias. For politicians like Rozis, it was essential to downplay the political aspirations of the *indigènes*.

A series of articles about Algeria by Jean Ducrot that appeared in *L’Illustration* (and was prominently reprinted by *La Dépêche Algérienne*) focused on demographic issues. While criticizing certain rightist actions, Ducrot attempted to justify the *colons*’ fears and actions. One of these fears was that political discord between Europeans dented the *indigènes* faith in French power and stability. The *colons* saw European unity as a defense against *indigène* agitation. They feared that any political debates risked reducing the authority of French colonial power. Ducrot described how striking dock workers put red flags on ships in the port of Algiers. The government allowed this type of behavior to go on relatively unhindered, and when *indigènes* from the countryside came into the city,

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68 Mark Orme, *Development of Albert Camus’s concern for social and political justice: “justice pour un juste”* (Madison, Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 46
69 Mark Orme, *Development of Albert Camus’s concern*, 64, 75-77
they saw the red flag and assumed that there had been a massive change. In one interview with *La Dépêche*, the general Paul Azan rejected any political concessions to the indigenes, because he claimed that spreading the same insidious divisions that plagued the French among the *indigènes* could only result in disaster. Rather, he argued that one should just wait, since the grand scheme of history would resolve these questions in due time. For the assimilationists, these were the truly frustrating statements that indicated how many *colons* would forever hold off political reform. The same edition’s front page featured an article that argued that the Viollette proposal would incite racial hatred amongst the *indigènes*, who it said had no prior ambitions and for the most part only cared for religion and material needs. The entire project was assumed to be a plot by the Popular Front to increase their political base.

The PCF attempted to dispute the claims that the Viollette Bill would ignite a racial war. Their demographic argument was a result of political calculations that we must take into account. The SFIO and PCF, if not numerically strong in Algeria, had built up good relations with some of the key Algerian political players, who saw the French leftists as natural allies in the struggle against colonial exploitation. However, the realignment of priorities in France soon led to a new colonial rhetoric. As noted earlier, the Communist policy of alliance with the Socialists brought about several compromises. Among these was the moderation of the previously unflinching fight against imperialism. Yet the PCF had to support the assimilationist Viollette Bill without completely reneging on its promises of independence.

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70 *L’Illustration*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Les conséquences du désordre en Algérie” September 17, 1936.
71 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “La place des indigènes n’est pas au parlement-nous dit le général Paul Azan” January 20, 1937.
72 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Cri d’alarme… L’Algérie en danger” January 20, 1937.
A new theory, constructed by PCF chief Maurice Thorez, reflected the new position of Algerian Communists, and aimed to reconcile Popular Front policy in Algeria with Marxist-Leninist doctrine. There were two aspects to Thorez’s formulation. One was based upon Lenin’s argument that the right to divorce cannot be equated with the obligation to do so. First used by Thorez in late 1934 when discussing potential autonomy for Alsace-Lorraine, such reasoning aimed to prioritize defense against fascism above national rights. Applied to Algeria, the position advocated French protection against Fascist Italy (whose recent Ethiopian adventure made especially worthy of suspicion) and Nazi Germany. The second aspect, more specifically formulated for Algeria, was still largely inspired by the spirit of the Popular Front. Thorez argued that the different ethnicities in Algeria (Arab, Berber, Jewish, French) constituted a heterogeneous community with a distinctive Mediterranean culture that would eventually form the basis for a unique state.\(^{73}\) The ideal goal for the French state was to protect and guide Algeria in its development. Here was perhaps the finest example of theoretical Popular Front colonial policy, reflective of the Parisian atmosphere of compromise, optimism, and community. Most importantly, Thorez’s formulation allowed the PCF to maintain its commitments to the Popular Front in France and to the Arabs and Berbers in Algeria. \(L’\text{Humanité}\) complained of the small scale of the reform, but promised its readers that it would constitute a first step to be followed up shortly after.\(^{74}\) To calm the apprehensions of moderates, \(L’\text{Humanité}\) stressed that all Popular Front action in Algeria was carried out peacefully and represented the entirety of Algeria’s population. On July


\(^{74}\) \(L’\text{Humanité},\) “La réalisation rapide en Algérie de la réforme électorale est conforme aux intérêts de la France et de la paix” January 15, 1937.
3rd, *L’Humanité* advertised these aspects in an article on the “grandiose funeral” of Jacques Zaoui, a slain Communist Youth member. 15,000 marchers displayed the solidarity of Muslims, Europeans, and Jews, who each featured a speaker. A photo of a march placed above the article described the crowd as supporting the Popular Front with “calmness and discipline.”75

The best opportunity for the PCF to prove the unity of the European and *indigène* proletariat came in late 1936 when Tahar Acherchour, a Berber immigrant in Paris, was killed by his employers, who were members of the PSF. Large demonstrations were held to honor Acherchour during the transportation of his remains to his village. In Paris, one of the PCF’s leaders, Marcel Cachin, applauded the solidarity shown by the 200,000 workers who paid their respects. Cachin described the event as “an affirmation of a deep solidarity between French and colonial workers who the capitalists try to pin against each other. It is the union of workers of different races…”76 Upon arriving in Algeria, the ritual continued as “the European and *indigène* workers, united in a moving gesture of fraternity, gathered to pass in front of the proletarian martyr.” A Muslim speaker differentiated the fascist employers from the people of France. The PCF’s policy of uniting the interests of French and Algerian workers of all races in an ideological struggle was encapsulated in a final dedication: “In the imperishable memory of the Algerian laborer, Tahar Acherchour, who died for the defense of bread and Republican liberties, is

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76 *L’Humanité*, “200.000 travailleurs parisiens et nord-africains escortent Tahar Acherchour tué par un patron croix de feu” November 30, 1936.
sealed the fraternal union of the French and Algerian people against murderous fascism.”

Despite their optimism, the rising tide of racism and xenophobia in France worked against the PCF. The Communists saw French-Algerian worker solidarity as a model for Algeria’s future as an integral part of France. The right used these PCF claims as proof that the poor *indigènes* were susceptible to dangerous communist propaganda. The North African geographer Augustin Bernard made this point in the conservative *Le Figaro* the same day that *L’Humanité* celebrated Acherchour. Bernard argued that Algeria was calm until the Popular Front came to power. He therefore assumed that *indigènes* immigrants involved with the Popular Front had introduced French conflicts in Algeria upon returning. In April 1937, the far-rightist “informational” newspaper *Le Matin* launched a high-profile series on Algeria that warned of the threat of “Islamo-Bolshevism.” One article pinpointed Paris as the source of North African communist agitation. According to the anonymous author, the typical immigrant received an education in the “red banlieu” which he brought back to the colonies. As proof, the author claimed that the number of Berbers leaving for Paris had significantly increased lately; from 60 a month in the first ten months of 1935 to 600 a month in the first ten months of 1936.

The *colons* were not the only ones to oppose the immigration of North Africans. When the Popular Front came to power, French xenophobia was widespread. The loss of

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manpower following World War I necessitated a large influx of immigrant labor in the 1920s. By 1931, immigrants constituted over 7% of the French population. After several years of unemployment, previously benign attitudes towards the foreigners became hostile. While the Popular Front eased some of the legal restrictions on immigrants, it failed to pass the pro-immigrant legislation that the SFIO and PCF had advocated in the early 1930s. The Humanité articles on Acherchour proved to be an exception. Articles dedicated to immigrants fell from 486 in 1934 to 48 in 1936. It is likely that the sudden increase in PCF membership caused a hesitancy to continue supporting immigrants. By playing down the issue, the left admitted that the majority of French workers and peasants approved of immigration and racial restrictions. The treatment of North-Africans in Paris by Radical politicians like Albert Sarraut was an expression of French apprehensions. With Sarraut’s timely support, a Parisian hospital that only served North-Africans was opened. The hospital was deemed necessary in order to watch over the immigrants while simultaneously controlling the many diseases they allegedly carried.

The rightist argument of “France to the French” therefore transcended political divisions. In the end, the PCF’s attempt to unify workers in France and Algeria was an uphill battle. However, the anti-Semitic nature of the Algerian right provided the left a golden opportunity to associate the French right with Nazi Germany. The most powerful figure on the French right, La Rocque, was very careful to distance himself from anti-Semitic views and Nazi beliefs. The popularity of his anti-Semitic Croix-de-feu sections

80 Bernstein and Milza, Histoire de la France au XXe siècle, 260.
81 Rahma Harouni, “Le débat autour du statut des étrangers dans les années 1930,” Le Mouvement Social 188 (July-September 1999), 68.
82 Rosenberg, “Albert Sarraut”, 105-106
in Algeria created a difficult situation for La Rocque. In June 1936, CDF membership in Algeria doubled from the previous year and reached 30,000, a number that compared very favorably to any metropolitan department. Yet the Algerian members were very open in their hatred for the Jewish population, and often committed violent acts against them. La Rocque lost control of the situation, and soon saw what little Jewish support he had in France dissipate. The Algerian right benefited from their anti-Semitic campaign in two ways. By portraying the Popular Front as an un-French government led by the Jewish Léon Blum, the right hoped to gain new adherents in their struggle against leftist reform. Secondly, they hoped to split apart the unity of Algerian Popular Front backers by driving a wedge between the Arab and Jewish populations.

*L’Humanité* began to report on the anti-Semitic aspect of the Algerian right in late June 1936 when militants in Oran were fighting strikers and shouting “Long live Hitler! Down with the Jews!” Shortly after, it accused the rightist press of fomenting anti-Semitic behavior after a Jew who murdered a *fellah* was killed in revenge. A quote from *Le Petit Oranais*, described as a fascist journal, backed up their claim:

As for you…filthy Jews, who, through hatred of a religion that is not yours, have ensured the triumph of the red candidate, YOU WILL FIND VERY NATURAL THAT SOON, SOONER THAN YOU THINK, THE POOR ARABS THAT YOU HAVE ALWAYS EXPLOITED WILL PREMATURELY SEND YOU INTO THE PARADISE OF JEHOVAH. The army that your communist representatives will have disorganized will not be there to protect you. And it was you who desired it! We have succumbed, certainly. BUT MISFORTUNE ON YOU, WE WILL TAKE OUR REVENGE.

Later reports of anti-Semitic behavior focused on the *colons’* attempt to alienate the Arabs from the Popular Front by focusing their anger on local Jews and Blum. The

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83 Kennedy, *Reconciling France against Democracy*, 87-88.
85 *L’Humanité*, “Les fascistes provoquent de graves bagarres à Oran” June 29, 1936.
rabidly anti-Semitic paper *La Libre Parole*, and its director, Henry Coston, who just lost an election in Algiers, was a particular threat, since it was frequently distributed throughout Oran. Ben Ali Boukhort, the head of the PCF’s Algiers section, warned how the propaganda from such papers was effective in this regard. He gave examples of article titles from one edition of another rightist journal, *Halte-Là* (Halt There), which included “When the Jews are Masters”, “The Jewish Inquisitors”, “The Jewish Speculators”, “Arabs Thrashed by Jews”, and “The anti-Jewish and anti-Masonic Marseillaise”. Boukhort warned readers that the Croix-de-feu placed a green flag next to the tricolor in order to attract Arab support, while in Ain-Témouchent, a local Muslim leader managed to pull 2,000 Arabs, who had been given gas to burn Jewish houses, out of a fascist march.87

A series of *L’Humanité* articles in the fall of 1936 further examined the actions of fascists in Oran. Several instances of Jewish persecution were related, such as militants in Sidi Bel-Abbès attacking Jewish shops and writing “Down with the Jews” on their houses, forcing the residents to flee. Throughout the countryside of Algeria, Jews were being cut off from society and forced to flee. On some houses, the blunt threat aimed at Jews of “Fuck off, or else we’ll bust you up” was written on walls and doors. In Mostaganem, *L’Humanité* accused the right of cynically trying to break apart the unity of the Popular Front by telling Arabs that the Jews wanted to starve them at the same time that they told Europeans that the Jews and Communists wanted to let the Arabs push them into the sea. The same technique was applied when trying to break up strikes. In an August dock strike in Mostagenem, the right gathered 2,000 men with a sizeable number of Arabs, who were encouraged to “come and defend your brothers, the Arabs of the city,

whose throats are being slit by the Jews by the sea at this moment.”

88 During the debate over the Viollette Bill, *L’Humanité* mocked the argument that the bill would incite hatred between Arabs, Jews, and Europeans, since there were still wall notices in Algiers that warned the sick that “Jewish doctors, midwives, and dentists are killing you slowly. Do not be their patients any longer.”

89 *L’Humanité* hoped to demonstrate that the only threat of racial war came from the fascists of Algeria.

While the unabashed fascist press spouted anti-Semitic propaganda (thus providing *L’Humanité* some fine ammunition), the more moderate papers chose to skirt around the issue. However, that does not mean that the papers were able to hide some revealing opinions. When describing the Algiers celebration of the Popular Front’s electoral victory in June 1936, *La Dépêche* played into rightist beliefs that the Jews controlled the left when it reported that the crowd was mostly made up of Jews and Muslims. *La Dépêche* also printed Constantine deputy Emile Marinaud’s response to charges of anti-Semitism. After winning his election, Marinaud claimed that contempt for the Jews was against “all good sense and the spirit of justice”, but defended his earlier call to defeat the Jews since they actively opposed his candidacy. 90 Senator Pierre Roux-Freissineng, defended the nationalist, anti-Semitic side of the Rassemblement national since its leader, the Mayor of Oran, Gabriel Lambert, lost a bid to become deputy because the Jews of Oran, who supported him just before the election, allegedly took directions from Paris and withdrew their help. 91

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88 *L’Humanité*, “Comment 1.000 fascistes armés venus occuper Mostaganem tirèrent par salves et tuèrent …” November 7, 1936.
89 *L’Humanité*, “La légalité républicaine droit être respectée en Algérie” March 26, 1937.
90 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Le Front populaire algérois a fêté, hier, sa victoire électorale” June 15, 1936 ; “Constantine après les élections” June 3, 1936.
91 *L’Echo d’Oran*, “L’interpellation de M. Roux-Freissineng, sénateur d’Oran” February 13, 1937.
In Jean Ducrot’s series on Algeria that focused on demographic issues, he explained how the old Jewish population had been assimilated, but the younger generations were secular and embraced radical leftist political ideas. This assertion led Ducrot to surmise that if a crisis were to occur in Algeria, it would most likely be in the Jewish quarters, since “a fact is making itself felt today: the most intelligent, ardent, but also turbulent elements of the leftist parties are recruited from the ranks of the Jewish youth.” The *colons* responded to Jewish political activity by adopting swastikas and anti-Semitic mottos. He then explained how Lambert’s electoral loss occasioned a fair amount of bitterness, which was summed up in an anonymous letter sent to the principal Jews of Oran. The letter claimed that the Jews’ lack of faith in the national idea barred them from the right to vote and justified anti-Semitic violence. Other *colons* tried to brush aside allegations of anti-Semitism by using the logic that it was only natural that they should attack the leftist Jews, who they believed encouraged the *indigènes*.\(^{92}\) In fact, the anti-Semitic nature of politics in Oran was a major factor in pushing Lambert into the extreme-right.

Lambert was originally elected in May 1934 on the “Democratic Action and Social Progress” list and followed a policy of balancing the various demographic interests of Oran. Before the 1936 elections, he even attacked the extreme right for desiring a French dictator. During a campaign he lost to a far-right competitor, the local press even smeared Lambert for being the “Jewish” candidate. After losing, Lambert immediately established the Rassemblement national, which unified the many right-wing factions of Algeria.\(^{93}\) Lambert’s transition from drawing on Jewish support to being the leader of a

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\(^{92}\) *L’Illustration*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, Sept 13-15 1936.  
\(^{93}\) Francis Koerner, “L’extrême droite en Oranie”, 572-574.
group that viciously attacked Jews reveals the novel aspect to this wave of Algerian anti-Semitism. The association of Jews and the Popular Front encouraged certain right-wing groups and individuals previously unconcerned with French Jews to take up anti-Semitism as an ideological tool.

Since the CDF/PSF and PPF avoided the issue of anti-Semitism in France, the fact that *L’Humanité* placed a much greater emphasis on the question is not surprising. Yet the Viollette debate pressured some CDF/PSF and PPF members into open declarations of anti-Semitism. One must look a little closer at what some of the influential figures who were supported by papers like *La Dépêche Algérienne* said about Jews. For example, a PPF member, Victor Arrighi told a crowd at a rally that Blum had already “circumcised” the franc, and now was looking to “circumcise” Algeria through the Viollette project. By that point, such words were nothing new, for the Jewish population had long been used as a tool of the various right wing groups in Algeria to both split apart the tenuous unity that the Popular Front had hoped to maintain amongst the Arabs, Berbers, Jews, and various Europeans. However, Arrighi’s comments presaged his total commitment to anti-Semitism in 1938. The creator of the PPF, Jacques Doriot, like La Rocque, avoided the issue of anti-Semitism. Since Arrighi was Algeria’s most important PPF member, whose militant strength largely resided in Algeria, his opinions eventually forced Doriot’s hand. As Laurent Kestel points out in his study of the PPF’s acceptance of anti-Semitism, it was

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Arrighi’s stance and the opposition to the Viollette bill that influenced the entire party. Doriot would eventually write:

As regards foreigners, Arrighi has come up with the watchword: *abrogation, revision of the Cremieux Decree* [which conferred French citizenship upon Algerian Jews in 1870]…We launched that watchword…because the mass of Jews, being incorporated into the parties of the Left and the extreme Left, were putting the colonizing French, the men of the Empire, the descendants of conquerors, at risk of losing their political sovereignty…Whoever has declared against this bill [the Viollette Bill] may be among our friends, whoever has come out in favor of it is certainly among our enemies. *It must be politically eliminated.*

Meanwhile, PSF anti-Semitism in Algeria pushed La Rocque to broaden his criticism of Jews, which in the past had been limited to foreign Jews. The pressure that the Algerian militants exerted on their parties contributed to the ease in which the Vichy government stripped Algerian Jews of their citizenship by repealing the Cremieux Decree in October 1940.

*L’Humanité* was not conjuring up horror stories, as the right freely admitted. The swastika and boycotts of Jewish stores were not denied, but explained away. On the ground, the ability to convince the Arabs who were suspicious of the Jews that the Popular Front government was run by an exploitative Jew was too tempting to pass up, and fit in too well with the *colons’* longstanding history of anti-Semitic behavior. The rhetoric and imagery which accompanied the militant right’s campaign was an extension of this long history but was clearly given extra impetus by the influence of Nazi Germany. Coston serves as an instructive example of the connection of European and

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95 Laurent Kestel, “The Emergence of Anti-Semitism within the Parti Populaire Français: Party Intellectuals, Peripheral Leaders, and National Figures” *French History* 19 no. 3 (September 2005): 378-380
97 Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 155, 278-279. La Rocque, though not as dedicated to the “National Revolution” as was Doriot, supported the repeal of the Cremieux Decree.
Algerian anti-Semitism. Only living in Algiers for a short while, Coston based his campaign on modern anti-Semitic views. The Jew was now the model of the three primary threats to French society, the capitalist schemer/exploiter, the foreigner, and the Communist. As long as the Popular Front could be associated with the Jews, the right could continue to define it as a foreign government that did not represent the true France or the true Algeria.

The questions of race and anti-Semitism plagued the Popular Front in both France and Algeria. The colons’ argued that the Viollette reform threatened French Algeria since Jewish leftists allegedly provoked Arabs and Berbers to stand up for themselves against the interests of France. The logical result of that conclusion was that any Popular Front reform in Algeria, including the Viollette Bill, could launch a racial war. While the far-right’s anti-Semitic campaign in Algeria risked de-legitimating the mother parties in France, there were no serious long term effects. The rightist parties maintained just enough control over their members and more militant local leaders to prevent large-scale bloodshed. However, the rightist directed their depiction of the Jews as an economic parasite at the Arabs as well, in the hopes that the poor fellahs would blame Jews for their condition. The colons, led by modern rightists, understood that a proposal had to be made to the indigènes in response to the Popular Front’s promises. The right offered economic and social improvement under the aegis of a humane and civilizing France. As a result, the right sharply diverted the Algerian debate from political to social and economic problems.
Chapter 2: The Rightist Alternative: Bread and Civilization

The colons argued that Algerian reform could take two forms: the Popular Front’s dangerous political program or colon promises of economic and social improvements. For the colons and rightists in France, the answer was clear. Rather than risk upsetting the colonial structure and conceding a victory to the Popular Front and the Communists, why not focus on the economic misery of the indigènes? If their standards of living could be improved, the colons expected the indigenous political movements to collapse along with Communist influence. Furthermore, such help would give the colons a moral argument, since they could present themselves as caring for the well-being of the indigènes. By taking on the role of benevolent rulers, the colons depicted Popular Front reforms as a threat to the age-old French civilizing mission. The colons claimed that they had the interests of the indigènes in mind because they aimed for complete assimilation. Meanwhile, the Viollette Bill was presented as a reversal of a century of French plans to create civilized indigènes.

In order to prove that the indigènes needed economic help more than political rights, it was necessary for the colons and the right to revise some of the previous images that had been displayed before the French. Since 1931, the metropolitan French had been exposed to a subtle, but relentless message highlighting colonial prosperity. The Algerian pavilion in the Colonial Exposition went to great lengths to brush away any popular notions of Algerian poverty, stating that “Modern Algeria, such as France has created it, is in fact an immense vineyard, a giant wine press, from which flows, like a natural spring, a river of wine. Wine is the future of Algeria, it is the great benefit France has
given to this land of sunshine, which is also a land of thirst.”

Throughout the 1930s, the Agency of Colonial Propaganda continued to impress upon the French the richness of the colonies, and the many products that France received from them. Pro-colonial images and descriptions were spread through cinema, radio, postcards, posters, and newspaper articles. However, by September 1936, Le Matin laid out a very different view of colonial “prosperity”. According to the paper, Algeria had become a land of opportunity in 1920, after a six billion franc investment program was initiated. But thanks to a rigid quota system that dictated metropolitan funding, Algerian expenses (debt payments, military spending, education, poverty programs) far out-weighed receipts. Le Matin explained how Algeria suffered under French protectionist policies. As the Algerian economy came to depend almost solely on wheat and wine exports, tax revenues fell. Indigènes bore the brunt of the decline, and frustration that France was failing in its civilizing mission quickly followed. Le Matin’s answer to all these problems was to impose authority, stop efforts at political reform, and address economic issues.

In March 1937 La Dépêche Algérienne began its own campaign to draw attention to the misère of the fellahs. The first editorial dedicated to the subject described the situation in southern Algeria in dire terms. An especially dry season brought low crop yields and reduced pasturage. Poor infrastructure prevented such seasonal crises from being alleviated. Since Communist agents allegedly used the resulting poverty to their advantage, La Dépêche implored the state to step in and distribute bread to the

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98 Andrew and Ungar, Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture, 308.
malnourished, provide loans to buy seeds, and prevent usury. The editors of La Dépêche apparently found this cry for help insufficiently alarming, and a different writer who went by the name A. Zannett, went to greater lengths. Entitled “A warning to France: One should not starve to death under the French flag”, Zannett’s editorial began by announcing that ample time had been given to discussion of electoral reform, but now it was the duty of Frenchmen to help starving Algerians. Zannett went on to claim that 2.5 million Algerians were suffering- and were prey to anti-French propaganda. Believing the entire colony to be in danger, Zannett even encouraged deficit spending, which the right (with the exception of Tardieu) only agreed to in times of national emergency. For Zannett, the Algerian situation qualified: “When a sick person is in danger of dying, his family sacrifices all that it possesses to save him. When we found ourselves at war and under attack, we spent everything without counting to liberate our country. We are in that situation now.”

The right-wing Mayor of Algiers, Rozis, wrote later that the economic troubles of the indigènes were so severe that the Muslim Congress’ calls for electoral reforms had gone unheeded by the intended beneficiaries. Taking advantage of Blum’s statement that a “pause” was necessary in Popular Front initiatives, Rozis called for a pause that would allow authority to be re-established as a means to help the material needs of the indigènes.

The same argument was made by Jacques Doriot, the head of the far-rightist PPF, in La Liberté. Doriot attacked the government for working on electoral reform while poor indigènes were starving and being pursued by Communists. Once again, the formula of

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101 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Alerte à la France! On ne doit pas mourir de faim sous le drapeau français” April 10,1937.
102 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Misère et politique indigènes” April 30, 1937.
material aid rather than political rights was re-iterated. Some asserted that *indigène* poverty could lead to a potential rebellion, as when the Oranese Senator Roux-Freissineng told the government in Paris that “This game of political chess is being played against a backdrop of a deep moral and material crisis in which millions of *indigènes* without bread, work, or land suffer. They are, in their ignorance and in their pressing needs, the incendiary element; the dry wood in the forest.”

*L’Humanité* offered a leftist view of the situation from an early date. In November 1936, it berated the abuses of *colon* landlords, who they called the “*gros colons*”. One article pointed to six exploited Arab workers whose wages were fixed by the local prefecture at 11-13 francs a day. Yet, on pay day, their employer only agreed to pay 6 francs per day. Those who complained were chased away with no legal recourse. *L’Humanité* believed that the *colons* paid such low wages in order to convince the *indigènes* that the Popular Front had not bettered their lives. The PCF also felt that anti-Communist administrators gave the employers a free hand against workers. One sub-prefect told local Muslim representatives who complained of exploitation that “I will put down the communists, even if it means losing my job.” The failure of the Office of Wheat in Algeria proved to the PCF that the *colons* would purposefully wreck legislation to gain a political advantage. Established by the Popular Front as a major initiative to protect and gain the political trust of the French farmer, the Office of Wheat continued

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104 *L’Echo d’Oran*, “L’interpellation de M. Roux-Freissineng, sénateur d’Oran” February 12, 1937.
the on-going trend of setting prices within the country and limiting foreign imports of wheat.106

*L’Humanité* pointed out that the fixed prices were ignored in Algeria, and that most *fellahs* had to sell their wheat at 50 to 60 francs per quintal, which was half of the price dictated by the Office. After selling for such low returns, they had to buy the semolina grains for the next harvest at prices 100% higher than in the previous winter. To make matters worse, the *colons* directed the *fellah’s* anger against the Popular Front and Blum.107 *La Dépêche* also viewed the Office of Wheat as a problem, not because it was applied incorrectly, but because it was inherently flawed. The call that “The unbelievable scandal that the Office of Wheat has brought must cease, as it wants the *fellah* to sell his weak harvest at the fixed rates, and if he must, buy his grain on the southern markets at rates that are 30 to 50 percent higher” echoed that of *L’Humanité*, but ignored the issue of exploitation.108 *L’Echo d’Oran* questioned the efficacy of the Office of Wheat in Algeria since it might push the *colons* into breaking up their land among the family, which would result in smaller harvests.109 Disappointment was also expressed in the fact that the Popular Front was not asking the Algerians what they thought of the issue, which would be an argument often repeated when the Viollette Bill came to the fore.

The right enjoyed picking apart other flaws in the Popular Front’s economic policies. Figures like Lambert questioned the leftist claims that the Algerian strike wave in June 1936 raised standards of living for the workers. *La Dépêche* quickly pointed out out

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107 *L’Humanité*, “Quand se décidera-t-on à agir contre les menées fascistes en Algérie?” December 25, 1936.
how rising prices would quickly cancel out the benefits of higher wages. One editorial went beyond this point (and yet unwittingly called it into question) by explaining how the higher wages granted in Algiers resulted in most dockworkers calling in sick because they could maintain their previous mode of living without working as much. According to the Algerian right, encouragement of strikes was not the only misguided economic policy pursued by the Popular Front. André Mallarmé protested that the struggling colony could not afford the recently established forty hour week and two week paid vacation. A more somber warning came from a shopkeeper, who thought that the new reforms sounded like an effective way to help the poor, but in reality would destroy the Algerian economy.

Whereas the right tried to link the threat of poverty with Communism to stall reform, L’Humanité used stories of exploitation as another reason why a reform that could defeat the interests of the gros colons and fascists was necessary. An article written by Virgile Barel, a PCF deputy from Nice, highlighted the misery of Algerians but placed it in a greater ideological context. Barel compared the continuing struggle to lessen the “iniquities, privileges, and injustices” of France with Algeria, where “there are even more. There, the difference in classes is accentuated by the inequality of men before the law… For 107 years the people of Algeria have waited in suffering and misery for the conqueror France to apply its own motto [Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité].” After describing in some detail the “almost savage state” in which the inhabitants of a village in Oran lived, Barel brought up the Office of Wheat. Since those harvesting barley had to sell

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110 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Quand le bâtiment...” August 1, 1936.
111 L’Illustration, as reprinted in La Dépêche Algérienne, “Pour ramener l’ordre en Algérie” September 20, 1936.
112 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Conséquences métropolitaines et algériennes des cinq premiers projets de loi, d’après M. André Mallarmé” June 12, 1936 ; La Dépêche Algérienne, June 13, 1936.
their crop at 25-40 francs per quintal, with the buyers selling to other *fellahs* at 110-115 francs, he sarcastically asked if the opponents of the Office were happy that an Office of Barley was not created, since it was clear that the *fellahs* would be exploited in any case. Barel went on to congratulate the town of Perrégaux for its rejection of fascist militants and politicians. According to Barel, only *indigène* political empowerment could end their economic exploitation.\textsuperscript{113}

However, *L’Humanité* had to be careful not to propagate anti-French rhetoric, so as to follow the moderate Popular Front policy and Thorez’s theory that Algeria could become a unique, diverse Mediterranean culture. Barel noted how the Europeans, Arabs and Berbers worked together in Perrégaux to drive out the rightists. In an editorial series in 1937, the Parisian deputy Charles Michels carefully distinguished the exploitative and the proletarian *colons*. In the first editorial, Michels decried the hundreds of thousands of starving Algerians. While calling for new social programs, he castigated employers who accepted government aid yet fought against pro-worker reforms. In his second editorial, Michels warned against conflating all Europeans and the exploiting *colons*, which would be akin to calling all Jews usurers. The numerous poor Europeans of Oran were proof of this fallacy. A few weeks later, Michels took on the rightist argument of bread before ballots by pointing out that political and social reform were not mutually exclusive. Michels also exposed a cynical PPF scheme in which PPF members publicly called for bread and higher wages for *indigène* workers while they privately colluded with

\textsuperscript{113} *L’Humanité*, “L’Algérie vous parle…L’exemple de Perrégaux dans le département d’Oran” April 16, 1937.
employers to temporarily lower wages. When wages went up, the PPF took the credit and posed as the defenders of the poor Muslims.\(^{114}\)

Despite their efforts, by September 1937, *L’Humanité* essentially conceded defeat on the Algerian economic front. In an editorial, the Parisian PCF deputy Henri Lozeray, Vice-President of the Colonial Commission, admitted that the Popular Front was losing its grip on Algerian Muslims because of economic and political reasons. The progressive labor laws were not easily applied in Algeria and the Office of Wheat had failed since most of the *fellahs* bought more wheat than they sold. Patience was running out for the imperfect, but promising Viollette Bill, and Lozeray warned that if action was not taken soon, then the Popular Front would lose the support of most Algerian workers thanks to incessant right pressure, as indicated by the mass of pro-Italian propaganda written in Arabic.\(^{115}\)

The rhetoric of the Algerian right borrowed from leftist arguments, even at the risk of alienating traditional conservatives. In their search for greater working class support, the Algerian far-right tended to condemn the capitalist system. The first large PSF gathering in Algeria was held in a working class *banlieu* of Algiers in order to attract as many European workers as possible. The keynote speech, given by Commandant Alfred Debay, focused on the ills of capitalism in its current form, since it promoted speculation, overproduction, and unemployment. Debay, following a doctrine that hoped to attract new members from all classes, made sure to equally condemn Marxist

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\(^{115}\) *L’Humanité*, “Le Front Populaire ne doit pas perdre l’Algérie” September 24, 1937.
utopias. Lambert made clear in an article entitled “The Rassemblement National is not a union of egoism” that he supported unions not affiliated with the PCF, and that he opposed the “two hundred families”, a leftist expression signifying the elites who allegedly controlled the French government and economy. Elsewhere, Lambert expressed his admiration for the social reforms of Fascist Italy, and teased the Popular Front for belatedly mimicking certain labor laws of their ideological enemy.

The anti-capitalist, pro-worker rhetoric was common property of the left and the right. L’Humanité not only attacked the excesses of capitalism in France, but pinpointed the great landowners as the real source of inequality and poverty in Algeria. Furthermore, they attempted to paint the Algerian PSF sections as being a tool for the political and social goals of the “gros colons.” In October 1936, L’Humanité claimed that “the true leaders [of the Algerian far-right] are the grand magnates of wheat and wine, the typical representatives of the Algerian exploitative class, the real masters of the country; the gros colons and the great monopolists of wheat and wine that constitute the caste of the two hundred families of Algeria.” As we saw earlier, the PCF attributed the failure of Popular Front economic policies in Algeria to these gros colons, whose power had been augmented by the recent doubling in the price of wheat and wine. L’Illustration answered such charges of exploitation by claiming that “the indigène has no need to be

117 L’Echo d’Oran, July 23, 1936.
118 Noguères, En France au temps du Front Populaire, 242-244. The phrase became popular after Daladier coined it at the October 1934 Radical Congress in Nantes.
119 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Une réponse de l’abbé Lambert au Front Populaire d’Alger” September 25, 1936.
protected or defended from the French, but rather from himself and from the social and economic environment in which he lives.”

The *colons* and rightists treated any economic policy emanating from France as a Communist inspired measure that did not take account of the peculiar situation of Algeria. In fact, some *colons* thought that labor laws were merely a means to weaken colonial rule. The PCF predictably responded by demonstrating the power of the *gros colons* and by effectively comparing the Algerian elite to that of France, which was under near universal criticism at the time. Even the right (at least the fascist elements) agreed with the left on this point. Yet the central economic argument of the right remained that of the poverty of the *indigènes*. By pointing out the failures of the Popular Front’s economic ideas, the *colons* positioned themselves as the only caretakers of the *indigènes*. Even if contradictions came about, such as one editorial in *La Dépêche* that claimed that the *fellahs* must be wealthier than the *colons* since they could afford the trip to Mecca, the emphasis on poverty enabled the right to change the subject from reform to social aid, thus casting themselves in the role of benevolent rulers. The left depicted poverty as a symptom of colonialist excesses while attempting to keep the focus on the grand exploiters and the idea of the “two hundred families” in order to protect their position as defenders of European Algerian workers.

For the right, economic and social reforms went hand in hand with the traditional ideal of France as a bearer of civilization. They argued that the Viollette Bill was a potential blow to the French goals of colonial assimilation. Moreover, since Algeria was the most important colony in the French Empire, reform there would set a standard for the other colonies. Consequently, the debate over reform in Algeria became exaggerated,

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121 *L’Illustration*, as reprinted in *L’Echo d’Oran*, April 24, 1937.
as can be seen in one sub-headline on the Committee for North African Coordination from La Rocque’s *Le Petit Journal*, which claimed that four men “hold in their hands the entire fate of our future and of our race, the heritage of a glorious past, the work of Lyautey, the stakes of our prestige and Empire, and of the war of tomorrow”. The idea of full assimilation was challenged by the Viollette Bill and allowed the *colons* to turn a debate which should have revolved around voting rights into one of French values and civilization. *Le Figaro* ran an editorial by a former Algerian administrator who said of the Viollette Bill: “It is the end of all *francisation*. It is the destruction of all the work France has accomplished. It is an open door to both a certitude and an unknown.” The certitude was that Muslims would soon control Algeria while the unknown was whether they would act as Muslims or as French, since assimilation had not yet been successful. The moment that Algeria became an issue, and even when the colonial press was still on the fence regarding the Muslim Congress, *Le Figaro* described Muslims pushing for reforms as “the most well-known Islamic agitators” and as being hostile to French civilization. The proposed reforms were called “prejudicial to our possessions” and a distraction from necessary measures to impose authority and improve living standards. Another editorial declared, “Let our authority remain firm and vigilant, just and paternal”. *La Dépêche* repeated the paternal sentiments when one editorialist undermined Viollette’s

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declaration of his love for the *indigènes* by retorting that one can love your children badly.\(^{126}\)

Others resurrected an even older justification for Empire. General Paul Azan went so far as to compare France’s duties in Algeria with those of Rome: building, managing populations, and encouraging commerce.\(^{127}\) The example of Rome as the archetype of civilization was a double-edged sword though. An Algerian professor living in Paris who supported the Viollette Bill described the Roman Republic’s decision to grant the plebeians political rights as an example that France should follow.\(^{128}\) For one of *La Dépêche*’s editorialists, Armand Lemoine, Rome offered a direct example of how to deal with the issue of political rights. Lemoine explained how Rome had conferred two types of legal status upon North Africans. One was simple to attain, but held few benefits, while the other provided all the rights of a full Roman citizen, but was only given to a few. According to Lemoine, this system was effective because it put North Africa under complete Roman control.\(^{129}\)

While references to Rome served as a minor means to justify the French civilizing mission, the issue of cultural values played a far more pivotal role. Defenders of French civilization attacked the Viollette Bill for planning to enfranchise Muslims who adhered to the personal status (local Muslim law). The right believed that legally assimilating Muslims who were not yet French was a violation of France’s purest ideals. Not only would the Viollette Bill threaten French values, it would also be a step in the wrong

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\(^{126}\) *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Faut-il accepter cette affirmation: « Pourquoi refuser aux indigènes algériens ce que la France a accordé à la plupart des indigènes de ses autres colonies… ? »” January 29, 1937.

\(^{127}\) *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “La place des indigènes” January 20, 1937.

\(^{128}\) *L’Echo d’Oran*, “Le professeur Balloul demande le vote du projet Viollette… dont il conteste l’origine front populaire” May 26, 1937.

\(^{129}\) *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Les témoignages de l’histoire” February 28, 1937.
direction for the Arabs and Berbers. Furthermore, the right accused the left of hypocrisy for supporting medieval laws while purporting to be progressive. Many of the arguments about the role of French civilization came from three moderate Radicals (or former Radicals) who were among the most influential Algerian politicians: Deputy André Mallarmé from Algiers, Deputy Paul Saurin from Oran, and Senator Pierre Roux-Freissineng from Oran. Though they tended towards Radical beliefs, none of them trusted the Popular Front. Their articles that bitterly attacked the Communists demonstrate the difficulties that the Popular Front found in replicating Parisian unity in Algeria. While they were not involved with the far-right like Lambert and Rozis, they found common cause in opposing the Viollette Bill, and were powerful advocates for the colons’ Algerian platform of civilization and economic progress. Mallarmé had some weight in Paris after occupying cabinet positions for the conservative Tardieu and the Radical Herriot. Roux-Freissineng was 73 years old, and used his age and experience to lead the debate against the bill in the Chamber of Deputies. Saurin’s influence derived from the reputation of his recently deceased father, a Senator, and connections with Roux-Freissineng. Saurin, like Lambert, became a rightist for political reasons. During an election in which the extremist Marcel Bellier challenged Saurin, the latter adopted a platform partially inspired by Fascist Italy. Bellier dropped out after La Rocque called Saurin one of the defenders “of the true France.”

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made themselves available to as many newspapers as possible, as their editorials and interviews appeared frequently in the Parisian and Algerian right wing press, while Saurin advocated his own electoral bill.

In *Le Matin*, Mallarmé focused on the legal problems raised by the Viollette Bill, but also attacked the Popular Front for supporting the personal status, since it allowed for polygamous marriages. Mallarmé attempted to point out Popular Front hypocrisy by asking, “Does the government, which is such a determined advocate of the total emancipation of French women, want to permanently establish the subjugation that lowers and destroys Muslim women?” Continuing his critique in *Le Figaro*, Mallarmé labeled the bill a type of “regressive” reform that would allow Muslims to become French while maintaining a “legal status from another age.” While he recognized that Turkey (which had become westernized under Ataturk) provided a model that the *indigènes* of Algeria wanted to follow, he insisted that they must become truly French first. A journalist for *Le Figaro* who simply called himself “Africanus” resumed Mallarmé’s arguments and wrote underneath a front-page headline, “A curious way to fulfill the civilizing mission: does the French government want to consolidate polygamy, slavery of women, and other old Muslim customs that even Turkey has renounced?” Africanus went on to explain: “To understand why Muslim law no longer belongs today, maybe it will suffice to say that it goes back to the 8th century and ceased to evolve in the 14th century. It has greatly contributed to the slow development of Muslim nations.” For Africanus, the *indigènes* refusal to adapt to French law was a result of their adherence to the Pan-Arabic

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134 *Le Matin*, “Le projet de loi accordant le droits politiques à 20.000 indigènes algériens soulève de véhémentes protestations” January 10, 1937.

movement. Jean Mélia, an Algerian leftist dedicated to assimilating the Muslims wrote in *Le Matin* that empowering anti-French Muslims would be dangerous for the “evolved” *indigènes* who had accepted French laws. Mélia assumed that if all Muslims were citizens, then the few assimilated Muslims would become a persecuted minority.

The *colons* and rightists responded to the Viollette project with their own electoral reform bill. The Saurin Bill, which was introduced by Paul Saurin at the same time the Viollette Bill was advanced, proposed a separate electoral college for Muslims. In this college, all *indigènes* could vote for their own candidates without renouncing their personal status. Since the special college aimed to limit the number of deputies the Muslims could elect, it would not change the power structure in Algeria. While the majority of *colons* did not admit it, the Saurin plan would have constituted the first step in officially ending the policy of assimilation. The institution of a special electoral status for the *indigènes* would implicitly create two castes: Muslim Algerian Frenchmen and European Frenchmen. Both Doriot and La Rocque supported the basis of the Saurin Bill, and accepted an end to assimilation. Effectively, the *colons’* and rightists’ alternative to the Viollette Bill led them to advocate the end of the very policy of assimilation they purported to uphold.

Yet in the summer of 1936, the colonial press was not overly hostile to assimilation or electoral reform. The Muslim Congress held on June 7, 1936 in Algiers pushed the papers into stating their opinions. The Congress was attended by

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representatives of four organizations: the Federation of Elected Muslims, led by Dr. Mohamed Bendjelloul, spoke for those who believed in extensive, if not complete assimilation. Sheik Abdelhamid Ben Badis led the delegation of the Association of Algerian Muslim Oulemas. The Oulemas were preachers and community leaders of an Egyptian reformist movement dedicated to social improvement and a more ascetic practice of Islam. A delegation from the Popular Front consisting of Algerian Communist and Socialist leaders also participated. In total, 1,700 delegates created a list of demands, including electoral reform.

Despite the relations between the Congress and Popular Front, La Dépêche looked favorably on the Congress, and declared it an “historic date” and a “victory for assimilation”, even though it also reported that the Congress supported the maintenance of the personal status. A photo of Muslims leaving the Congress kindly described how “the immense crowd passes in good order.” However, the newspaper urged the delegates to look to the colons, and not to Paris for help. La Dépêche warned the Muslims of the infidelity of leftist politicians and advised them to “Take friends where you can find them.” Shortly after, La Dépêche printed a letter from a Muslim who was upset that the Congress’ delegates worked with the Popular Front. He then affirmed the motto designed to convince Muslims that the colons were their only supporters: “We will content ourselves to take our friends where we find them.” In June 1936, L’Echo d’Oran ran a series of editorials by J. Romagny, who not only argued that political rights

143 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, June 9, 1936.
144 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Un Congrès des Musulmans représentant l’Algérie entière se prononce pour l’assimilation à la France et le maintien du statut personnel” June 8, 1936.
145 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, June 13, 1936.
for the *indigènes* were necessary, but that the personal status was not as serious of an obstacle as some thought. Romagny even used one of Viollette’s favorite arguments when he pointed to the *indigène* voters of Senegal, who maintained their status, as an example of the practicality of allowing *indigènes* to vote.\(^{146}\) The *colons* were hesitant to hastily reject the demands of Muslim leaders since they wanted to focus their attacks on the Popular Front.

Two events that occurred on August 2, 1936 saved the *colons* from the awkward position of tentatively supporting reforms they had fought against in the past. After returning from Paris, delegates from the Muslim Congress held a rally at the municipal stadium in Algiers. The nationalist Messali Hadj’s speech created a scandal by adamantly rejecting the notion of assimilation-inspired reform in favor of complete independence.\(^{147}\) Algerian nationalism thus burst into the open in a dramatic fashion. In 1926, with Communist help, Hadj had founded the organization, Etoile Nord-Africaine (North African Star). The Communists’ new policy of Popular Front unity and French security led to an estrangement, and Hadj’s organization became completely independent.\(^{148}\) Hadj’s opposition to assimilation damaged the legitimacy of the Muslim Congress even though he was promptly barred from further participation. The *colons* and rightists used Hadj’s speech to connect the nationalists and Communists, even though their relations had been severed.

\(^{146}\) *L’Echo d’Oran*, “Les droits politiques des indigènes” June 25, 1936 ; “Electeurs et naturalisées” June 27, 1936.


\(^{148}\) Gillespie, *Algeria: Rebellion and Revolution*, 42. Gillespie points to 1935 as the moment when Hadj gave up communism for nationalism. Hadj made his decision while in exile in Switzerland, where he met the Lebanese pan-Islamist Chekib Arslan.
At the same time that Hadj presented his views before the crowd in Algiers, another serious threat to Algerian leftist unity arose when hired killers assassinated the pro-French Mufti of Algiers, Bendali Mamar Mahmoud. The press immediately used the occasion as proof of the evil intentions of the Popular Front and the Muslim Congress, even though no evidence connected them to the crime. Since the killers struck in a tense and complex political atmosphere, there was room for speculation. The colonial press thought that since Mahmoud had worked with the French to ban the Oulemas from preaching in mosques, the latter must have been responsible for his murder. Le Figaro assumed that the murder was inspired by secular rivalry, and pointed out that the Mufti’s opposition to the Muslim Congress and its delegation to Paris had marked him as a target. Six days later, a front page editorial by Roux-Freissineng was entitled “The Mufti’s Assassination is a Political Affair.”  

149 L’Humanité asserted that those in favor of reform had no possible motive, since the Popular Front was in power and eager to initiate reforms. Furthermore, L’Humanité went on the attack by accusing the Algerian right of attempting to frame the left in order to split apart both Muslim unity and Muslim-Popular Front unity.  

150 Although the instigator of the crime was never found, the story died down after about a week. However, the political damage was great. Bendjelloul, head of the Federation of Elected Muslims, turned against the Communists, nationalists, and Oulemas, taking with him some of the assimilationists who never felt comfortable with the suddenly moderate Communists. Bendjelloul was expelled from his position as president of the Executive Committee of the Muslim Congress on October 5, 1936. Local

149 La Figaro, August 10, 1936.
150 L’Humanité, “Le Grand Imam d’Alger assassiné au sortir de la Mosquée” August 4, 1936
Socialists and Communists, in an attempt to maintain unity, worked together to portray Bendjelloul as a traitorous fascist. From August until the fall of 1936, the *colons* used Bendjelloul to demonstrate the danger of reform. Just two days after the events of August 2, Bendjelloul spoke out against the Communists and nationalists in an interview with *La Dépêche*. Rozis publicly thanked him in an RNAS meeting. Yet, when the Viollette Bill was introduced, Bendjelloul decided to support it, and once again worked with the Communists and Oulemas. The *colons* no longer trotted out his statements, since they never saw him as anything but a tool to discredit the Popular Front and reform.

From August on, the rightists and *colons* increasingly associated the Muslim Congress and its demands with the various movements they thought threatened Algeria. As a result, they felt no compunction in advancing the Saurin Bill. Meanwhile, they conveniently sidestepped the issue of assimilation. *L’Echo d’Oran*’s editorialist Romagny pointed out that in a unique electoral college the *indigènes* would be upset because the candidates would be Europeans. Furthermore, he argued that the supporters of the Viollette Bill were a raucous few, while the Muslims who agreed with the Saurin bill constituted a silent majority. Romagny provided no evidence for these conclusions.

Pierre Taittinger, Deputy of the Seine and founder of the fascist-inspired militant league, *Jeunesses Patriotes* (Patriotic Youths), offered a far-right critique that attempted to trip up the Popular Front’s arguments. Taittinger began by conceding that the personal status issue was not a serious one. However, he objected to the creation of a new aristocracy composed of those deemed worthy of French citizenship just as France finished its eradication of ancient Algerian feudalism. Furthermore, he believed that the limited

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scope of the Viollette Bill violated the French ideal of universal suffrage. The conservative Pierre-Etienne Flandin went so far as to say that French women should be able to vote before the indigènes. Such arguments were specious since the rightists and colons had never been stalwart defenders of universal suffrage. The right also felt obligated to speak for the Muslim veterans of the war. Le Matin complained that few of the 150,000 Muslim Algerian veterans would be included in the Viollette Bill. According to the newspaper, the veterans believed no one should get the right to vote before every ex-combatant was enfranchised. When the Association of Muslim Ex-Combatants came out in support of the Viollette Bill in March 1937, they deprived the right of one of the many techniques they employed to undermine the legitimacy of the bill.

The common thread in the criticism of the Viollette Bill was the attempt to portray it as a regressive reform that debased French values. These values included equality, fair treatment of women, universal suffrage, laicism, and respect for veterans. Yet, the Saurin Bill they advocated provided no long term answer to the problem of assimilating Muslim Algerians, and actually would have cemented differences in the French and Muslim communities. This proposal did not aim at actual reform of the Algerian electoral system since it had no chance of being passed, but merely provided a base from which to attack the Viollette Bill. The poverty of the Muslims was another tool used by the colons and rightists to shape the terms of the Algerian debate. Politicians and journalists reversed five years of propaganda that spoke of colonial prosperity by emphasizing the poverty of Algeria. More importantly, the economic reforms were

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153 La Dépêche Algérienne, “L’accession à la citoyenneté de certaines catégories d’indigènes” December 31, 1936.
155 Le Matin, January 25, 1937.
depicted as disastrous for the local economy and the well-being of the *indigènes*. By expounding on the economic failures of the Popular Front, the *colons* and rightists hoped to question the capability of the coalition to tackle other Algerian problems. For the moderates, proper Algerian reform would continue the tradition of the French civilizing mission. The extreme-left, led by Lambert, co-opted the leftist anti-capitalist stance and promised social reforms without the threat of leftist revolution. Even if moderates like Mallarmé and Roux-Freissening did not agree with the far-rightist rhetoric, they did see eye to eye on the issue of Communism. The rightist campaigns against poverty and the anti-French Viollette Bill were also campaigns against Communist influence. Editorials on these subjects frequently mentioned the Communist threat. We will now examine some of the specifics of this anti-Communist struggle, which soon convinced the Communists of the large-scale presence of fascism in Algeria.
Chapter 3: The Popular Front and Authority in Algeria

The spread of Popular Front political culture and tactics to Algeria in the summer of 1936 quickly mobilized the right. The once moderate Gabriel Lambert created the Rassemblement national d’action sociale just weeks after Léon Blum took office. The RNAS served as an umbrella to gather the many right-wing leagues and parties in Algeria. Political disputes which Algerians believed would decide the future of the colony were brought into the streets in a series of confrontations. Strikes, marches, and large meetings became the norm, as each side constantly sought to assert their power or provoke a fight. Both right and left accused certain members of the Algerian administration of colluding with the opposition. The right argued that the agitation and disorder caused by Communists created an atmosphere so dangerous that political reform was impossible. For the left, Algeria was the refuge of the most militant, fascist elements of the French right. Without crushing the Algerian fascists, the left felt that real reform was impossible. The Viollette Bill was once again swept up in greater political issues.

The strike wave that spread from France to Algeria, though brief in duration, was the central event that sparked the entire idea of an Algerian crisis, into which many other anxieties were quickly drawn. The right, both in Paris and in Algeria, did not react with much hostility to the Muslim Congress and the potential political threat it posed. Mobilization was caused by the demonstrations in favor of the Popular Front and more importantly, the strikes. As long as only a few Muslim elites demanded social and political reform, the colons felt comfortable. But comfort turned to fear when thousands of Arabs and Berbers in every major city went on strike and showed solidarity among

156 Koerner, “L’extrême droite en Oranie”, 574.
themselves and the leftist parties. *L’Humanité* celebrated the strikes for their order, and above all, the unity of Europeans, Jews, Arabs, and Berbers. The right was desperate to portray the strikes as only involving *indigènes* blindly led into ineffective demands by Communist agents.

*L’Humanité’s* account of the Mostaganem dockworker’s strike contained many narrative elements that the PCF looked for. The employers, who were connected to the Croix-de-feu, refused to grant collective contracts and attempted to use strikebreakers to end the sit-down strike. The local rightists gathered to take matters into their own hands, but were met by a barricade held by Arab, Spanish, and French workers. The Arabs brought in by the leagues deserted when confronted with the prospect of fighting against their brethren. The rightist attack was repulsed, and the workers began to drive them back. Before the rightists could be pursued, the gendarmerie stepped in to stop the violence. This narrative corroborated the PCF’s depiction of Algeria. The local administration was sympathetic to the right, only stepping in when it had lost. The rightist leagues that had been banned in France were continuing their blatantly illegal actions in Algeria, but were defeated by a unified association of workers who took action only when necessary.157

The account on the following day in *L’Echo d’Oran* presented a drastically different version. According to their story, a certain Alvarez had recently established an “Autonomous Union” which promised to respect the cherished rightist value of “freedom to work”. When the CGT called a strike at the port of Mostaganem, the Autonomous Union came to work at 5:30 in the morning and found the CGT workers waiting there. A fight broke out in which Alvarez was badly hurt; by the end, both sides agreed to

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157 *L’Humanité*, “Comment 1,000 fascistes armés venus occuper Mostaganem” November 7, 1936.
negotiate. After two hours of haggling, the two waiting boats were split up: each union would unload one. That night, when the Autonomous Union went to file an official complaint, they were attacked and a general fight involving Communist and nationalist elements began.  

La Dépêche depicted the strike as one instigated by the CGT snuffed out by the RNAS.

The colonial press generally portrayed the right-wing militants as the defenders of Republican law, since the Popular Front’s new legislation and attempts to reconcile employers with strikers was seen as a violation of the freedom to work. The line being crossed by the strikers, as in the Mostaganem case, was the occupation of the work areas. The mayor of Algiers Rozis deplored the usage of the sit-down strike since it did not allow employers to get full returns on their investments. L’Illustration’s series highlighted the fact that in France, many worker demands were met; while in Oran strike breakers did all they could to prevent the occupation of work areas. The RNAS provided an institutional form and organization to these anti-labor actions. Lambert used the occupations to equate the Communist Popular Front with fascism (then, as now, a term that political opposites tried to pin on each other). In an article entitled “Call to the Oranese against Red Fascism”, Lambert painted a rather somber picture of the result of the strikes:

Gone is the freedom to work, gone is the freedom to gather, gone is the freedom of movement, gone is the freedom of the property owner to dispose of his possessions. The reds are here. They are the masters. They command. The streets are theirs: they have the freedom to make gestures.

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158 L’Echo d’Oran, “De très graves incidents se sont déroulés hier à Mostaganem” August 4, 1936.
159 La Dépêche Algérienne, August 4, 1936.
161 L’Illustration, as reprinted in La Dépêche Algérienne, “L’organisation de la défense patronale-Le Rassemblement national” September 14, 1936.
and cry out. The warehouses, the shops, the cafés, the hotels, the factories are theirs. They position themselves everywhere whether one likes it or not. One must yield to them!

Lambert went on to disprove the idea that the strikers were willing participants since he had asked someone to secretly ask 126 workers if they agreed with the work stoppages or not, to which 90 said no. 162

The coordinated actions of the CGT convinced La Dépêche that the strikes were indicative of a much larger threat to French institutions and ideals. When the CGT called a strike in the docks of Algiers in June 1937, the conservative associations opposed to the Popular Front loaded several boats as a means to break the strike. La Dépêche could hardly contain their joy at the “failure of the communist CGT dictatorship” since it involved the voluntary taking up of work that the right placed so much emphasis on ideologically. However, the CGT still had a trick up their sleeve, and the next day’s headline bitterly reported what had happened: “The Great Misery of the Port of Algiers under the CGT dictatorship: The dockworkers of Marseille refuse to unload Algerian goods.” For the right, these events confirmed their belief that the CGT was run from Moscow and represented an anti-French minority. 163

The colons’ opposition to strikes became universal. In 1935, the peasant fascist Henri Dorgères attracted a considerable number of members to his organization from Algerian colons. The experiences of the Popular Front in 1936 dissipated such support. In late 1936, Dorgères threatened a strike that would deprive Paris of fruits and vegetables. A spokesman for his Central Committee of Peasant Defense said that all of France’s producers would obey, including those in Algeria. The next day, La Dépêche celebrated

162 L’Echo d’Oran, June 26, 1936.
163 La Dépêche Algérienne, June 10, 11, 13 1937.
the failure of any such action and spoke of workers who were taken aback to read in the newspaper that they would be going on strike, for they had heard nothing of it. Readers were assured that any delays in food shipments had been due to bad weather and that Dorgères had no influence in Algeria.\footnote{La Dépêche Algérienne, “La grève maraîchère sera générale aujourd’hui- L’Algérie adhère au mouvement et suspend ses expéditions” December 16, 1936 ; “La grève des maraîchers à Paris : Les primeuristes algériens ne participent pas au mouvement” December 17, 1936.}

To maintain the idea of solidarity among the Europeans, the colonial papers were careful to point out the racial composition of the strikers. \textit{La Dépêche} was particularly concerned by the daily meetings of strikers that the CGT held at the Civil Hall of Algiers. The first report emphasized that almost all of the 3,000 strikers at the Hall were \textit{indigènes}. On June 23, 1936, over 10,000 strikers congregated to coordinate their actions. \textit{La Dépêche} reported that in the Ouenza mines, \textit{indigène} strikers worked up by foreign propaganda made a bid to take over the loading station which was defended by European workers. The \textit{indigènes} were thus portrayed as naïve victims of the leftists while the Europeans were steady bearers of social stability.\footnote{La Dépêche Algérienne, July 1, 1936.}

Perhaps the most alarming action by the \textit{indigènes} was agricultural agitation. Squads of Arabs and Berbers went into the countryside to try and force the \textit{fellahs} to cease working for the landowners, with violence if necessary. The \textit{colons} judged the situation to be so critical that they demanded the application of an emergency decree from 1881 which would provide the isolated colons with effective weapons.\footnote{Samya El-Mechat, « Le gouvernement du Front populaire et la poussée nationaliste au Maghreb” Revue d’histoire maghrébine 11 (1984) : 89.} \textit{Le Matin} quickly caught on to the tactic as early as June 17, 1936. In September, it reported on bands of red-flag-bearing \textit{indigènes} using armed force to besiege vineyard cultivators.
who refused to join them. In an open letter to Governor General Le Beau, La Dépêche blamed the Communists for sending unemployed Muslim youth into the countryside to harass farmers. Shortly after, an editorial described a new plague that was weakening Algerian vineyards, that was just as dangerous as any parasite. This new threat was the agricultural strike, which fortunately was a foreign strain not native to Algeria, and therefore expungable. While the colonialist press feared Muslim participation in strikes, they always attributed the underlying causes to Communist schemes.

The colons and rightists were perturbed by the strikes because they provided an opportunity for the indigènes to work together with the left in an open and public space. The left viewed the strike breaking actions of militant groups as the first symptom of a native Algerian fascist movement. Public demonstrations of ideological faith raised the tensions created by the strikes. But the Popular Front reached Algeria in more forms than just strikes. The culture of symbols and rituals that largely defined French political activity after February 6, 1934 suddenly sprouted up in Algeria after the Popular Front came to power. Originally considered ideologically inappropriate by Marxists, the usage of symbolism and mass rallies became essential to the left in order to compete with rightist and fascist movements that excelled at consolidating support through spectacle.

The French leftists borrowed their first symbols from the German leftists who opposed

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167 Le Matin, “A Relizane, en Oranie des indigènes armés assiègent dans une ferme des vendangeurs qui ne voulaient pas se laisser débaucher” September 7, 1936.
168 La Dépêche Algérienne, June 13-14, 1936.
169 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Lettre ouverte à M. Georges Le Beau” June 17, 1936.
170 La Dépêche Algérienne, “Défense de la viticulture-Un nouveau parasite: le gréviculteur” July 1, 1936.
the Nazis. One important instance was the raised fist, intended as a militant response to the Nazi salute. The French Communists began using it, and were soon followed by other leftist parties after February 6. A flood of songs, flags, and uniforms added a sensory experience to French politics. In Algeria, these gestures became an object of debate since the Algerian right freely associated themselves with fascist symbols while Muslims took up the symbols of the Popular Front.

A series of articles by Georges Gallais in *L’Humanité* in late 1936 sought to prove through symbols that the Algerian right was truly fascist in character. Photos of swastikas painted on walls appeared on several front-pages, with one headline reading: “The Fascist Plot in Algeria.” Gallais described a scene in a popular square in Sidi-Bel-Abbès where the nationalists had gathered:

Suddenly, the loudspeaker diffuses the first measures of a tune that is not unknown to us. One believes he is dreaming, but no, it is indeed *Giovinezza*. In a concert of enthusiastic yelling, all of the occupants of the terrace stand up, arms outstretched, fixed at attention; we say all of them because, like the civilians, the officers of the Foreign Legion are standing and the among the most ardent to salute. The people from here tell us that this is a rather usual custom.

Worse still, in a village six kilometers away, the inhabitants celebrated the Nazis and had an orchestra play *Deutschland uber Alles*. Anyone who opposed the festivities was beaten.

Even before the Popular Front came to power, La Rocque had already warned his Algerian Croix-de-feu members to avoid using the fascist salute. Embarrassments continued nonetheless, as CDF members saluted Mayor Rozis of Algiers as he left the

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172 *Giovinezza* was the anthem of the Italian Fascist Party.
The Algerian right completely disregarded caution once open conflict with the Popular Front broke out. The attendees of the August 1, 1936 PSF meeting in Algiers sang the *Marseillaise* with arms outstretched. *La Dépêche* certainly did nothing to hide such gestures: their headline proclaimed “Without Hatred and With the Open Hand (fascist salute), 25,000 Algerians Swore Yesterday to Unite All Frenchmen against Ruinous Communism and Foreign War.” The mass ceremonies in Europe that often included oath-taking rituals were thus repeated in Algeria. Shortly after, the front page of *La Dépêche* depicted a large photo of leading rightists, including Rozis and Lambert, at a meeting of the RNAS, giving the fascist salute while singing the *Marseillaise*. Far from playing down such gestures, the right invented ways to justify them. The RNAS declared in *Oran-Matin* that “If, as a rallying gesture, the RNAS chose the open hand, it is not for sympathy for Hitler… but to respond with a hand raised in a gesture of hatred towards the raised fist.” The RNAS members may not have realized that they were running in circles by doing so, considering the raised fist itself was a response to the fascist salute.

Symbols and gestures were not isolated features of the political tension, but key aspects of a greater struggle to dominate public spaces. During the pro-Popular Front demonstrations held throughout Algeria in June 1936, the red flag was a common sight. *La Dépêche* described the unholy trinity during the June 14th demonstration: red flags, raised fists, and *L’Internationale*. The journalist was particularly alarmed by the Muslim...
women in the crowd who yelled “La Rocque to the gallows!” with their fists in the air.  

The right responded by beginning a campaign that advocated the widespread display of the tricolor. *La Dépêche* placed a large notification on its front page that told its readers to fight the Communist symbols with French flags.  

On July 14, 1936 in Oran, Lambert successfully united the *colons* and rightist factions, which he had just begun to court, through a massive nationalist demonstration. Between 50,000 and 60,000 showed their opposition to the Popular Front (Lambert claimed 80,000), compared to 12,000 to 20,000 supporters.  

*Le Petit Oranais* framed the *colons'* victory in terms of symbols: “Resounding revenge of July 14th. It was a worthy reaction against the lamentable Popular Front demonstration in which the tricolor was overrun by red flags…We now know that in our department, the tricolor is still the flag of France.”  

Not content with outdoing the leftists in the field of flags, the RNAS introduced a song, *Le Front de la France*, to compete with *L’Internationale*. Right-wing leagues had already tried to appeal to the people through songs in France, so it is no surprise that the RNAS tried the same. *L’Echo d’Oran* quickly called the new song a success that would soon be sung in the *métropole* since it would be broadcast in Algiers, Toulouse, and Paris.  

The Algerian right used symbols to mobilize their base, but also felt more threatened by Popular Front symbols than their metropolitan counterparts. Many feared that the Muslims threatened order, the press pointed to Communist symbols as evidence
of the cause. The agricultural strikers that raided farms were said to chant Communist slogans and carry red flags.\textsuperscript{186} The indigènes also prominently employed Communist symbols in Popular Front marches. La Dépêche reported that the Muslim Congress members who held a January 1937 meeting in Algiers began the evening by raising their fists as they sang the \textit{Marseillaise} and \textit{L’Internationale}.\textsuperscript{187} More concerning to the right were the cases of children singing \textit{L’Internationale}. One man from Algiers hit a child over the head for singing it, which apparently offended a passerby, who began a fight that ended with gun shots fired.\textsuperscript{188} The emotions aroused in this case were indicative of a larger frustration with the Algerian school system for encouraging children to sing leftist songs.

The education of the Muslims was a popular subject, since improvements were badly needed. Furthermore, the goal of assimilation depended upon a high quality educational system. In 1936, lack of educational infrastructure was one of the central concerns. While 138,100 Europeans were enrolled in public schools (with another 9,200 in private schools) under the tutelage of almost 4,000 teachers, the Arabs and Berbers had only 59,000 students in public schools, of whom 58,000 were boys, taught by 1,500 teachers. Private schools were virtually non-existent for non-Europeans, with fewer than 750 students enrolled. Though some called for higher budgets to accommodate the increasing population, other critiques questioned the social implications of education.\textsuperscript{189}

Jean Ducrot argued that additional Muslim schools were too expensive, given the rough

\textsuperscript{186} La Dépêche Algérienne, “Aujourd’hui la grève sera complète dans le bâtiment” June 12, 1936 ; “Six cents indigènes communistes attaquent une ferme à Relizane” September 6, 1936 ; Le Matin, “A Relizane” September 7, 1936.

\textsuperscript{187} La Dépêche Algérienne, “Le comité d’Alger du Congrès musulman tient un meeting en faveur du projet Blum-Viollette” January 26, 1937.

\textsuperscript{188} La Croix, “Encore des bagarres en Algérie” July 17, 1936.

\textsuperscript{189} L’Echo d’Oran, “Pour l’enseignement en Algérie” September 10,1936. The numbers came from a report used by the Governor General Le Beau in 1935.
in which some had to be established. Furthermore, he questioned the role of those Arabs and Berbers who were well-educated. If they believed themselves to be French, but were shunned by the *colons* and the poorer Muslims, then they would be dangerous social outcasts. Fortunately for Algeria’s children, this argument never became a basis for policy.

In the short term, calls for new schools were accompanied by outrage over the actions of certain teachers. Concerns about education soon became wrapped up in the political struggle. In one small town, a teacher was reported as having the Arab children memorize and sing *L’Internationale* while raising their fists. When not accusing teachers of similar offenses, Lambert focused his anger on those who held the unpatriotic belief that deserting in any future war would be a duty. As a result, the *colons* believed that the teachers inculcated nationalist and Communist ideas among the Muslim youth, and sapped the students of their patriotic strength by preaching pacifism. To add to their frustration, the school director of Mostaganem, Eugène Rethault, also the president of the local RNAS section, was suspended for public comments which were deemed to threaten the Republic. The backlash included a student strike and resignations by sixteen local mayors. Lambert compared his suspension to the Popular Front’s support of the leftist teacher’s delegate of Oran, who allegedly taught the French to desert. How could

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190 Gosnell points out that French schools for Muslims were built in the countryside to escape criticism. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness*, 49.
191 *L’Illustration*, as reprinted *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Pour ramener l’ordre en Algérie” September 20, 1936.
192 *L’Illustration*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “L’organisation du désordre en Algérie” September 15, 1936.
193 *L’Echo d’Oran*, “Le Rassemblement national à Saida…Plus de 2.000 patriotes font le serment de barrer la route au fascisme rouge” August 27, 1936.
194 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Les maires de seize communes de la région de Mostaganem démissionnent…pour protester contre la suspension du directeur de l’école de la ville président de la section du Rassemblement nationale” October 3, 1936.
the Popular Front, Lambert asked, support those who, through the education system, put French authority in question and confused the indigènes, while the loyal, true Frenchman like Rethault were attacked?\textsuperscript{195} L’\textit{Humanité} pointed out that the Academy of Algiers had to move him from Biskra, where he was teaching Arab children, because the locals could no longer tolerate a teacher who despised the Arabs so much.\textsuperscript{196}

While school personnel engendered debate, the content of French-sponsored Muslim education remained an issue. By 1936, French-run schools aimed to instill French values while connecting students to their Algerian past. However, contradictions resulted from this balancing act. Foremost of these was the standard French history textbook which began by saying “Our ancestors, the Gauls…”\textsuperscript{197} In this case, either the Republic would have to re-define what made someone French or admit that the assimilationist ideal was impractical. Teachers who attempted to appeal to Algerian history and identity came under scrutiny for challenging the superiority of French civilization and authority. An article in \textit{La Croix}, the largest French Catholic newspaper, highlights the uphill struggle that confronted teachers in Algeria. In the front page article “The Troubles of North Africa and its Schools”, Jean Guiraud attacked the secular schools of Constantine for an official history book that advanced the Islamic-Communist agenda against France. The text challenged the historical narrative that France’s colonial and assimilationist mission depended upon by taking an Arab view of the Battle of Tours-Poitiers in 732:

\begin{quote}
If the Arabs had been stronger, they would have stayed in our home (France) and great changes would have taken place. They would have rendered France more
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{L’Echo d’Oran}, “A propos de la suspension de M. Rethault directeur d’école, président du Rassemblement national de Mostaganem” October 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{L’Humanité}, “Le complot fasciste en Algérie” October 28, 1936.
\textsuperscript{197} Gosnell, \textit{The Politics of Frenchness}, 67, 41.
prosperous and more beautiful. They would have constructed great cities and superb houses. They would have fabricated beautiful carpets and richly sculptured weapons. Indeed, the Arabs were not barbarians...They were more civilized than France was at that time, but they had a different religion than the Franks.

Despite the careful use of language (the word French is not used), which left open the possibility for a reconciliation of the two cultures, Guiraud feared numerous facets of this type of lesson. Foremost was the concern that the Arabs could start a racial conflict with a newfound confidence in their history. Guiraud also considered dangerous the assumption that Christianity helped to defend a less civilized culture. While such a reaction is not surprising, it is notable that Guiraud proposed no alternative to educating Arab and Berber children who had no relation to French history. Instead, he settled on blaming Communist authors who used friendly unions to get leftist text-books published. Although Guiraud admitted that the same book extolled the virtues of modern France, he deemed threatening any attempt to provide a sense of identity to the Muslims beyond French values and history.198 For Guiraud, the threat was two-fold; the Communists were indoctrinating Muslim children who already had a tenuous connection to the ruling culture.

The colons’ preoccupation with keeping Communist propaganda away from the indigène children is all the more remarkable considering some of the similar devices used by the Oulemas. Although the Oulemas compromised by offering lukewarm support for the Viollette Bill,199 their real goal was an independent, Muslim Algerian state. Borrowing from popular European culture, the Oulemas established boy-scout programs

198 La Croix, November 9, 1937.
with a song that affirmed that “The Algerian people are Muslim. Their genealogy is Arabic / Those who said it has abandoned its origins and claimed it is dead have lied / Those who seek its assimilation seek the impossible.” Their schools taught children the simple motto: “Islam is my religion. Arabic is my language. Algeria is my country.”

Yet, while the rightists and colons continually denounced the presence of anti-French propaganda, they were largely oblivious to a much more serious threat to their authority. However, this is not surprising given that the right believed that the Popular Front and the PCF was somehow responsible for all of Algeria’s ills. In their search for scapegoats, both right and left went beyond schoolteachers to attack the entire Algerian administrative structure.

The reactions of local administrations to strikes and demonstrations rapidly became a point of contention. The Communists were convinced that the gendarmes and mobile guard not only sympathized with the right, but allowed them to engage in violent actions. The moment that the rightists were in danger, the Communists complained, the police would step in, often violently. For the right, the very occurrence of strikes and marches proved that the administration was riddled with functionaries from the métropole who leaned to the left and did not care for the colonial structure. *L’Humanité* began their campaign by accusing the mobile guard of coordinating an attack on strikers with Lambert’s RNAS militants. One Muslim died and twelve were wounded, thus prompting a call for Lambert to be restrained and an accusation that the mobile guard had been

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placed at the service of an agent of Hitler.\textsuperscript{201} Shortly after, \textit{L'Humanité} condemned the police for firing on workers who had been provoked by CDF members.\textsuperscript{202}

Worse still were the nefarious actions that the PCF attributed to the “fascist” authorities. The PCF believed that their Algiers chief, Ben Ali Boukhort, failed to win a municipal council seat as a result of fascist administrators’ tampering with the vote in favor of the CDF candidate, Barek Ben Alla.\textsuperscript{203} A few weeks later, \textit{L'Humanité} charged the men who allegedly deprived Boukhort of his post with killing the Mufti of Algiers. When the Imam Habibatni survived an assassination attempt at the Mufti’s burial, the right-wing press argued that the Arabs and Berbers were feuding, since both the Mufti and Imam were Berbers. \textit{L'Humanité} however, thought that fascists behind both acts aimed to disrupt the peaceful relations between the two ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{204} The PCF’s image of a completely unified Algeria, with the exception of the \textit{gros colons} required another answer to the assassination attempts, and the charge of a fascist provocation played into popular ideas of Algerian unity and defense against fascism.

The punishment of a fascist leaning officer in October 1936 gave the PCF some encouragement that the administration would clamp down, but concern was still expressed over the loyalty of the Foreign Legion.\textsuperscript{205} In March 1937, after the Foreign Legion fired on striking miners at Kouif, \textit{L’Humanité} asked why companies were allowed to contract the military to suppress workers.\textsuperscript{206} The collusion of the Foreign Legion with employers created a right-wing stronghold in Sidi Bel-Abbès, according to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{201} \textit{L'Humanité}, “Les fascistes provoquent de grave bagarres à Oran” June 29, 1936.
\textsuperscript{202} \textit{L'Humanité}, “Les fascistes provoquent des bagarres sanglantes en Algérie” July 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{203} \textit{L'Humanité}, “L’élection de Ben Ali Boukort doit être validée” July 21, 1936.
\textsuperscript{204} \textit{L’Humanité}, “Un inconnu tire sans l’atteindre sur le Mufti de Constantine et prend la fuite” August 12, 1936.
\textsuperscript{205} \textit{L’Humanité}, “Le danger fasciste en Oranie et au Maroc” October 9, 1936.
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{L’Humanité}, “Deux ouvriers grévistes blessés succombent” March 12, 1937.
\end{flushleft}
L’Humanité. Inhabitants openly adopted Nazi and Fascist beliefs, and beat up anyone who opposed them. Paul Bellat, the son of Sidi-Bel-Abbès’ mayor, used his connections to attack a Popular Front demonstration on June 14, 1936 and launch an anti-Semitic press campaign throughout the department of Oran. L’Humanité feared that other military units were just as hostile to the PCF as the Foreign Legion. In Mostaganem, L’Humanité complained of the mostly Catholic Senegalese troops, who often said of the workers, “Communists not good, we kill all of them.”

The PCF’s insistence on calling for law and order in Algeria was predicated upon the survival and power of the right-wing leagues. Not brooking any armed illegal opposition, the Popular Front had dissolved the rightist militant leagues on June 18, 1936 and began to consider shutting down certain newspapers after the Minister of the Interior, Roger Salengro, committed suicide following a ruthless campaign of character assassination led by the far rightist Parisian weeklies. La Rocque’s CDF quickly converted into a traditional party, the PSF, while Jacques Doriot created his own party, the PPF. However, in Algeria the banning of the violent leagues was never executed, and the formation of the Rassemblement national in late June 1936 actually gave the various groups more cohesion and unity of action. Since key political figures in Algeria, like the mayors of Algiers (Rozis) and Oran (Lambert) were heavily involved in the RNAS, the colons felt that the armed leagues which broke up strikes and demonstrations were backed by a lawful force. In an article entitled “The Thief Cries: Stop Him!”, La Dépêche claimed that such force was indeed legal if it opposed illegal actions directed by Communists. While the newspaper denied the Communist deputy Florimand Bonte’s

208 L’Humanité, “Un étrange directeur” November 8, 1936.
claim that the Algerian administration was sympathetic to fascist militants, it warned that Algeria would fend for itself if legal powers refused to protect them.\textsuperscript{209} From the perspective of the RNAS, the Popular Front had weakened the colonial structure by putting the totality of colon control in question. The belief that the Arabs only respected power meant for the colons that any reduction of tight controls would soon lead to a slippery slope of new demands. In the end, the right passionately advocated a return to order so that the status-quo would remain intact, whereas the left attempted to clear the ground for social and political reform.

*La Dépêche* began its attack against the Popular Front’s handling of the colonial apparatus in July 1936 when Salengro met only with Algerian representatives who supported the new government. In a highly publicized meeting of the RNAS, Rozis was quoted as saying that the lack of a government response to the assassination of the Mufti while Hadj was delivering the most anti-French speech ever uttered was proof that the Popular Front would not care for the very crisis it had created.\textsuperscript{210} The motto “Liberty in a unique sense” became a popular expression in *La Dépêche*, which frequently charged the Popular Front with unfair treatment of the right. In one instance, the newspaper pointed out the hypocrisy of a government decision to ban a PSF meeting in Algiers the day after the Communists held one. *La Dépêche* wondered why the patriotic La Rocque was thus silenced when the traitorous Communist agent Barthel was allowed to speak.\textsuperscript{211} *Le Temps*, a conservative Parisian newspaper, questioned the legality of the Popular Front’s Algerian reforms, since they were advocated by delegations that had no legal power (like

\textsuperscript{209} *La Dépêche Algérienne*, August 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{210} *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Sans haine” August 10, 1936.
\textsuperscript{211} *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Liberté à sens unique: Le premier Congrès du PSF de la région d’Algérie-Tunisie est interdit d’ordre du Gouvernement Blum” April 13, 1937.
the Muslim Congress). Furthermore, *Le Temps* argued that Parisian politicians ignored knowledgeable Algerians who advised against reform.\(^{212}\) *La Dépêche* even derided the properly constituted Commission of Inquiry into Algeria, since, “It is not with expensive parliamentary commissions or even more expensive ministerial trips that we will improve the fate of the [Arabs and Berbers].”\(^{213}\)

Lambert made clear his belief that the Parisian government had limited freedoms in Algeria. When the president for a special delegation to Perrégaux decided to ban public demonstrations before municipal elections, Lambert replied in his usual mixture of militant threats tempered by a declared respect for legality. According to him, Perrégaux had become Moscow, where freedom of movement was restricted, though such extreme action by the supporters of the Popular Front revealed their desperation. Indeed, Lambert claimed, if the RNAS wanted, it could storm the town, though it preferred a sham election to violence. Since he assumed any rightists would be beaten (literally) if they showed up, he declared the parties adhering to the RNAS would back out of the election but retrench elsewhere against a foreign government (the Popular Front). Finally, he decreed a general mobilization of the department of Oran.\(^{214}\) The other right-wing parties did not want to give up, and Lambert attempted to go to Perrégaux the day of the election to ask that it be annulled, but was barred.\(^{215}\) In April 1937, a Correctional Tribune fined Lambert 100 francs for provoking an armed gathering with his declaration of mobilization. After castigating the Popular Front for its disrespect for the law, Lambert

\(^{212}\) *Le Temps*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Réformes algériennes” December 21, 1936.

\(^{213}\) *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Tuons le communisme et la misère sinon ils nous tueront” March 20, 1937.

\(^{214}\) *L’Echo d’Oran*, “Les élections municipales de Perrégaux” February 25, 1937.

\(^{215}\) *L’Echo d’Oran*, “Les élections municipales de Perrégaux” March 1, 1937.
wrote, “As for me, I once again decree the mobilization of the department against arbitrary actions and injustice. Prosecute me, Monsieur Leon Blum!”

Like the Communists, the colons felt that local administrators with strong political beliefs undermined order. Since the right would not countenance the idea that the French were different from the colons, it was necessary to point out that France was sending left-leaning civil servants to Algeria. Those that sympathized with Muslim political participation were especially irksome to the colons. In L’Illustration’s series on Algeria, Ducrot described how a civil servant marched alongside Arabs holding red flags as colons asked “Have you lost your head? What are you doing with these Arabs? Is it an insurrection you want?” The civil servant replied, “Exactly that, this is the Arab’s home, here in this country, and the best thing they can do is to kick as many of you as there are into the sea.” This response placed him in the hospital, though Ducrot excused the colons’ behavior by asking, “But can we believe that such words fall on deaf ears?” Ducrot believed the civil servants from France were at fault, since they did not care for Algeria’s future.

The rightists won a huge victory in April 1937 when Raoul Aubaud, Under-Secretary of State, said “First of all, it seems to me absolutely necessary - if we want, and we do want, to maintain French sovereignty in Algeria - to uphold without any weakness the authority of the administration.” As if to tie in Algerian reform with the receding tide of the Popular Front, Aubaud later declared “We must also have a “pause” down

216 L’Echo d’Oran, May 6, 8, 1937.
217 L’Illustration, as reprinted in La Dépêche Algérienne, “L’organisation du désordre en Algérie” September 15, 1936.
218 La Dépêche Algérienne, MM. Raoul Aubaud et Rivière ont quitté l’Algérie hier” April 9, 1937.
there [Algeria], so that work can be organized in the calmest atmosphere possible."  

Ever since Blum used the fateful word “pause” to describe the government’s new financial policy in March 1937, the Popular Front had essentially given up on any further notable reforms. Aubaud’s use of the word to describe the new Algerian policy was a signal for the colons that the battle had been won.

A “pause” in colonial reform meant a new focus on the maintenance of authority. While the Viollette Bill was still technically alive, the new colonial policy of the Popular Front conceded a political victory for the *colons* that could not be overturned. The success of the claims that the entire colonial structure was about to fall apart was enough to sway the Radical Party, which was not willing to countenance colonial reform if it put French security or authority in question. The combination of the Radical Party’s hesitancy to enact colonial change and the PCF’s conviction that French security was paramount meant that the Popular Front could back off of colonial reform without risking any loss of political capital at home.

Both right and left had effectively used the press to point out that their opponents had undermined law and order in Algeria. In the aftermath of public demonstrations whose participants borrowed from the tactics and imagery of the *métropole*, the press spread alarmist reports about the influence and capabilities of radical political parties. Furthermore, the involvement of the *indigènes* threatened the status of the *colons*. In the end, the right won this debate, as key Radicals like Aubaud agreed with their view. Since the *colons* and rightists portrayed the Viollette Bill as part of the Popular Front/Communist campaign, it too was a victim of the campaign against Communist subversion. Yet the debate was not limited to the local actions of Communists and

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fascists. The press also depicted Algeria as the subject of larger domestic threats to the French Republic itself as well as a prime target of foreign powers, both Soviet and Fascist.
Chapter 4: Algeria as an Ideological Battlefield

In April 1937, General Mangeot mused that if Lyautey said in 1914 that the fate of Morocco rested on the Rhine, than it was now possible to say that the fate of France rests in Algeria. The presence in Algeria of so many competing ideologies supported by foreign governments lent weight to Mangeot’s claim. The Spanish Civil War played a large role in making Algeria a geo-political focal point. On July 17, 1936, Spanish Morocco became the base for a military insurrection against the Spanish Republic and its Popular Front government. The political tensions in France dramatically rose overnight. Because of Algeria’s proximity to Morocco and the radicalization of local political parties, both the right and left began to consider the role Algeria might play in a similar insurrection. The Communists pointed to the open threats the extreme right-wing was making, and highlighted their connections to French “fascist” leaders and Fascist Italy. The right fantasized an image of an anti-French alliance between Communists and Islamic nationalists that Le Matin dubbed Islamo-Bolshevism. Both sides believed that international agents and local people would co-operate to undermine the Third Republic. In the context of such accusations in the press, the stakes of the Viollette Bill grew even greater. The left saw a chance to resist Algerian fascism and the rising power of Fascist Italy and Spain, while the right claimed that the bill would herald a Communist revolution.

Each side assumed that foreign agents, or French agents paid by foreign governments, were actively provoking the daily hostilities between right and left. During the strike wave of July 1936, La Dépêche Algérienne began a vicious campaign against

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220 La Dépêche Algérienne. “La France va-t-elle perdre l’Algérie, la Tunisie et le Maroc? Un intéressant débat sur cette question s’est ouvert hier, au club de Faubourg” April 11, 1937.
Pierre Fayet, the CGT leader of Algiers. Special front page sections entitled “The Wolf in the Sheepfold” described the communist behavior of Fayet, and his “foreign” wife from Czechoslovakia. *La Dépêche* blamed them for the strikes because at large nightly meetings they allegedly told workers to demand ever greater concessions until the employees triumphed. The paper blamed them for the increasing incidents in the countryside, and even claimed that they were Comintern agents.\(^\text{221}\) The campaign was called off after the Fayets were violently attacked in their home on July 13. *L’Humanité* placed the news on the front page, its importance marked by the articles to the left and right: a call to demonstrate on Bastille Day and a notice of the murder of Calvo Sotelo, which triggered the Spanish Civil War. The article blamed *La Dépêche’s* campaign for the attack on Fayet.\(^\text{222}\) *La Dépêche* responded a week later by absolving itself of responsibility. Furthermore, *La Dépêche* claimed, its coverage of Fayet told the truth about “enemies of France and Algeria.” As a final justification, the article included a statement in bold letters: “Algeria will not live unless communism is killed.” *La Dépêche* joined the *colons* and rightists in associating the Fayets with their primary Algerian target, Jean Chaintron, who went by the alias Barthel in Algeria.\(^\text{223}\)

Barthel came to Algeria in October 1935, and set about increasing the Muslim participation in the PCF’s Algerian section. Since the party had no clear position on France’s colonies, Barthel appealed to the Muslims by promising independence.\(^\text{224}\) André Ferrat, an uncompromising PCF member who helped shape colonial policy, directed Barthel when he first arrived. In a stunning mistake, a circular distributed by Barthel that

\(^{221}\) *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Le loup dans la bergerie” July 5, 7, 10, 1936.
\(^{222}\) *L’Humanité*, “Fayet secrétaire des syndicats d’Alger est attaqué par quatre fascistes” July 14, 1936.
\(^{223}\) *La Dépêche Algérienne*, July 21, 1936.
\(^{224}\) Wall, “Front Populaire, Front National”, 36.
referred to “oppressive and foreign France” reached the local Croix-de-feu section, which promptly handed it over to *La Dépêche*. Over a year later, *La Dépêche* still highlighted Barthel and the circular “that our readers know well.” Barthel was sentenced to jail for one year, but did not serve, which greatly irked the right. Maurice Pujo, a founding member of France’s original far-right wing party, *L’Action Française*, fumed, “We demand that this communist...know another cell than those in which he preaches to Arabs of murdering the French. We demand that the condemned Chaintron, called Barthel, submit to the law...” In a series of front-page opinion pieces, *Le Matin* called for Barthel’s incarceration and an investigation into why he was not in jail. The first asked how Communists could claim to favor order and security in North Africa if they were content to let Barthel loose. Three days later, *Le Matin* explained how Barthel may have been let off: he was the head of the PCF’s colonial section. Finally, *Le Matin* accused a newly elected Socialist deputy from Algiers of countermanding Barthel’s punishment to repay Barthel, who dropped out of an electoral race for the same seat. The question and justification, “Was there no connection between the concession and the lifting of the punishment? It is worth posing the question...” revealed the willingness to implicate politicians in crimes without undertaking a proper investigation, since *Le Matin* did not follow up on their assertions. Nonetheless, the Algerian press was delighted to mention *Le Matin’s* “findings”. Even though Barthel left to fight in Spain with the International Brigades, La Rocque’s *Le Petit Journal* saw his shadow everywhere, and

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227 *L’Action Française*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Le cas Barthel” March 18, 1937.
228 *Le Matin*, January 14, 17, 20, 1937.
229 *La Dépêche Algérienne*, January 21 1937.
blamed him for orchestrating strikes and organizing agitators before he sought “refuge” in Spain. Barthel proved his dedication to the PCF and to France by fighting the Nazis in Belgium, escaping at Dunkirk, and taking part in the Resistance. Yet, the future bearer of numerous French accolades, including the *Legion d’honneur*, was one of the right’s best examples of the danger that the left posed to French Algeria.

In April 1937, *Le Matin* ran a series of articles about the Communist threat to Algeria. Once again, the right justified its Algerian claims with the proof of Barthel’s wrongdoings. *Le Matin* depicted him as an “agent from Moscow” dedicated to tricking Muslims into becoming Communists. Yet the article concluded that Barthel had merely set an example that had since become standard practice for many Algerian Communists. Barthel was only a symbol of the Communist influence in Algeria, which, according to many press accounts, went well beyond one agent. Later in the year, *Le Petit Journal* concluded that Moscow and Berlin each had interests in Algeria and each promoted the same goal: Arab/Islamic nationalism designed to overthrow French rule. Jean Ducrot believed that events across the Muslim world affected the *indigènes*, who learned of them through the propaganda services of Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and Rome. Furthermore, Ducrot attributed the agricultural agitation to Communist and Nazi agents who dressed like *fellahs*. The latter allegedly brought in Syrian Islamic propaganda records made in Germany, as well as short films. *Le Matin* chose to focus on Moscow’s influence, which culminated in an article entitled “Moscow and Islam”, in

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231 Anciens sénateurs IIIe République., “Jean Chaintron” Sénat, http://www.senat.fr/sen4Rfic/chaintron_jean0185r4.html (accessed March 1, 2010). Barthel also served as a Senator and was excluded from the PCF due to his critique of Stalinism.
which the author attempted to prove that Moscow had been setting up North African cells since the end of World War I. The author also asserted that Comintern directives aimed at establishing closer relations between Middle Eastern and North African Communist Parties served as evidence of the Communists’ attempt to use pan-Islam as a weapon.  

Ironically, while *Le Matin* made this claim, the PCF ramped up attacks against Algerian nationalists.  

Well before *Le Matin’s* accusations appeared, Augustin Rozis had already warned the *colonos* of the connections between Communists and Muslims by quoting Omar Ouzegane, an Algerian Communist leader, who addressed Muslims of Morocco and Syria (who had been fighting French rule), “we will together take our resounding revenge, for facing you, facing us (Algerians), and facing the Ethiopians as well, there are only fascists, the mortal enemies of Muslims who only a year ago dared to appropriate Abyssinia only for the richness of its soil.” Clearly, the true danger of Communism in Algeria appeared to be its ability to mobilize North-African movements. Former Minister of the Colonies Louis Rollin wrote in *La Dépêche*, “In France, the doctrines that manifest themselves through the raised fist and the *Internationale* are detestable, down there (in Algeria), they are criminal!” One of the weaknesses of the Communists was their former connections with Messali Hadj’s nationalist Etoile Nord-Africaine. Despite the

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236 Wall, “Front Populaire, Front National”, 37-39. Wall points out how Hadj was called a Trotskyist, the most serious Communist accusation at the time, after he came out in opposition to the Viollette Bill. Furthermore, Wall believes the PCF committed to policy of French security in August 1936 with the expulsion of Ferrat and the start of the Spanish Civil War. Planche, however, argues that the PCF only made this decision with the debate over the Viollette Bill in the spring of 1937. Whatever the case, when the Etoile Nord-Africaine was banned in January 1937, the PCF did not protest, thus rendering the *colon* arguments completely baseless. Planche, “Le parti communiste d’Algérie”, 33.
complete break with Hadj after his August 2, 1936 nationalist speech, the Communists struggled to dissociate themselves from the ENA. *La Dépêche* thought the two were working closely together, though they were merely repeating rhetoric from Doriot’s PPF.\(^{239}\) Despite Blum’s decision to dissolve the ENA in January 1937, *Le Petit Journal* still claimed that its continued existence was a result of Moscow’s funding.\(^{240}\)

However, due to the *colons’* depiction of the *indigènes* as apolitical, they often contradicted themselves or confused their message. If they truly believed that Algerian nationalism and Pan-Islamic movements were powerful threats, then they would have had to come to grips with a massive problem. After the assassination of the Mufti of Algiers and an attempt on the life of another pro-French Muslim leader a week later, *Le Matin* declared that Oulema inspired nationalism was as dangerous as Communist agitation.\(^{241}\) However, as time went on, they put these issues aside by downplaying the newer ideologies and focusing on the traditional Communist threat. André Mallarmé believed that Bendjelloul’s expulsion from the Muslim Congress meant that the Communists controlled the Congress. He also thought that the *indigènes* could be easily pulled away from such a foreign ideology.\(^{242}\) In fact, the *colons* argued that the Communists planned to use the Muslim and North African movements and discard them when the time came. *Le Matin* predicted that the Communists goal was to make North Africa either a “Soviet Republic, a Soviet colony, or a Red Dictatorship.” To justify this claim, the correspondent added, “Has not the Comintern proclaimed that the International Revolution would only begin once the Soviets established a foothold in the

\(^{239}\) *La Liberté*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Le communisme, voilà l’ennemi” January 8, 9, 1937. *La Liberté* was the main newspaper of Doriot’s PPF.

\(^{240}\) *Le Petit Journal*, “La Pression rouge” October 29, 1937.

\(^{241}\) *Le Matin*, “L’assassinat du muphti d’Alger” August 9, 1936.

\(^{242}\) *Le Petit Bleu*, as reprinted in *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Le communisme en Algérie” October 11, 1936.
Mediterranean? The Comintern has now realized that its efforts in Spain and France will not succeed. It has therefore shifted its center of agitation in the Mediterranean and has brought its pressure specifically upon North Africa.”

La Dépêche, without any evidence, reported that PCF members affirmed plans for a Soviet takeover of Algeria in a national meeting in early 1937. Therefore, the right thought Algeria was the center of the “Islamo-Bolshevik alliance”, a new strategy in Moscow’s plans for worldwide revolution, which had run against problems in Spain and France.

The implications of this alliance were drastic for the colonists and rightists who saw Communist plots everywhere. The editorialists and politicians who used the press to paint a dark picture of Algeria’s future benefited from two commonly held beliefs about Algeria and North Africa. The first was that the colonies were essential to French security, since the additional manpower helped level the playing field against a much more populous Germany. The second was that the colonies provided key materials and markets that brought prosperity and economic advantages in wartime. Since expositions, posters, movies, advertisements, and the press had inculcated these beliefs in the French population, alarmist declarations about the colonies took on a great weight. In August 1936, Le Figaro remarked that Algerian problems must be solved because of the importance of Mediterranean shipping and of protecting Morocco, since the Spanish Civil War had exposed the latter to dangerous influences. Le Matin expressed their fears for France in a front-page headline that read “Communist Propaganda is putting Algeria in mortal danger: Yet the destiny of France greatly depends on the well-being of Algeria.”

244 La Dépêche Algérienne, “La conférence nationale du Parti communiste” January 23, 1937.
The article called nationalist, Islamic, and anti-Semitic issues mere Communist ploys to advance their schemes.\textsuperscript{246} From an early date, Lambert brought French security into the equation, albeit in a threatening way, when he wrote, “Let our government take notice of [the agitation]. It is playing a dangerous game here. With a torch, Léon Blum is dancing around tons of powder. One false step and the fire will be everywhere with explosions that risk reaching the métropole!”\textsuperscript{247} Clearly, others shared Mangeot’s opinion that Algerian events could affect France.

By early 1937, the warnings of a Communist plot reached a fever pitch. The Clichy Affair of March 16 did little to alleviate the tension. In France, La Rocque’s PSF planned a meeting at a Cinema in Clichy, a working class town outside of Paris with strong connections to the PCF and SFIO. The residents demanded that the Popular Front government ban the meeting and decided to counter-protest when Blum turned them down.\textsuperscript{248} Coincidently, as Simon Kitson points out, there may still have been some anger over the murder of the Algerian Berber Tahar Acherchour in Clichy by his PSF employers. Between 6,000 -10,000 protestors gathered, and violence soon broke out as the police struggled to keep the militant leftists away from the Cinema. The police killed six protesters and wounded over one hundred others. Though it is impossible to confirm, there is some evidence that rightist provocateurs may have played a role in initiating the violence.\textsuperscript{249} Regardless of who started the incident, the Clichy Affair greatly widened the ideological split. In the Chamber of Deputies, Blum denounced the absurd press

\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Le Matin}, “La propagande communiste met l’Algérie en péril mortel” September 22, 1936.
\textsuperscript{247} \textit{L’Echo d’Oran}, “Où sommes-nous? En République ou en Tsarisme rouge?” July 17, 1936.
\textsuperscript{248} Colton, \textit{Léon Blum}, 202-203.
coverage, especially those who reported that revolutionary violence had broken out in
Paris and that France had fallen into civil war.\textsuperscript{250}

La Dépêche Algérienne was one of the papers that overreacted. Not only did it
treat the events as proof of the PCF’s plans in France, it placed a large front-page
headline reading, “Let us kill communism and misery or they will kill us: Have we
thought, asks us a Muslim representative, of the dreadful experience that an Algerian
Clichy would bring?” For La Dépêche, Clichy was the proof of what they had been
reporting all along; that Communists were seeking outright revolution. The bombastic
sentence “[Communist agitation] is no longer the precursor to revolution, it is the
revolution itself” led to a depiction of the Clichy events as an attack against the Republic.
Furthermore, La Dépêche believed similar attacks on law and order had led to 1789,
1799, 1848, 1851, and the Spanish Civil War. In Algeria, recent occurrences of indigène
agitation proved that the Communists were “paving the way and preparing men for an
Algerian Clichy.” In case anyone questioned the veracity of such claims, La Dépêche
insisted that they were not spreading panic, since they possessed documents and facts that
attested to their warnings.\textsuperscript{251} By associating Algerian events with Clichy and Spain, the
right hoped to further alienate the general public from the Popular Front.

Le Matin played into this image of Algeria with their aforementioned series that
credited “Islamo-Bolshevism” with fifty incidents of bloodshed across North Africa
during the previous six months. The Algerian magistrates who talked to Le Matin’s
correspondent compared a recent revolt in Tunisia to the 1934 Asturian miner’s revolt.
The shadow of Spain, which had hovered over Algeria since July 1936, came out more

\textsuperscript{250} Noguères, \textit{En France au temps du Front Populaire}, 146-147.
\textsuperscript{251} La Dépêche Algérienne, March 20, 1937.
clearly in an editorial in *La Dépêche*. About two weeks after *Le Matin*’s article, several leftists assailed Lambert as he met the Parisian Commission of Inquiry into Algeria. *La Dépêche* feared that the leftists of Algeria would soon drive the colony and the métropole, into a civil war, just as the Spanish leftists had done only a year previously. The paper also worried that Lambert was the type of figure to begin a violent conflict, and hesitated to support him. Rather, *La Dépêche* advocated the PSF slogan of “Homeland, Family, Work” while attacking the radical left for trying to slowly, but surely bring a full revolution into France, even if at the bloody cost of Russia or Spain.²⁵²

However, the large right wing papers were reluctant to make Spain a major issue, as it risked justifying a military insurrection upon which not one right wing party in France or Algeria was ready or willing to embark. Radical figures like Lambert may have made free use of the example, as when he declared that there was no more authority in France, just as there was none in Spain when Franco rose up. But Lambert’s authority did not reach beyond Oran.²⁵³ The PCF made much more effective use of the Spanish example in their attempt to root out Algerian fascism. *L’Humanité* relentlessly portrayed the Algerian rightists as fascists with designs on the Third Republic through front page articles and the “In the Colonies” section that appeared every four days or so. Especially damning in the eyes of the left were the colons’ connections with Spain, Germany, and Italy. Since the Algerian right escaped the legal sanctions directed against the metropolitan right, the Violette Bill became part of the leftist attempt to decisively curb the influence of one of the radical French right’s strongest redoubts.

²⁵² *La Dépêche Algérienne*, “Désordres en Oranie: Sur les chemins sanglants des Soviets et de l’Espagne” April 27, 1937. The PSF motto is not in the correct order, perhaps in an attempt to maintain some distance, however small, from the PSF.
²⁵³ *L’Echo d’Oran*, “Les élections municipales de Perrégaux” February 25, 1937.
Ben Ali Boukhort wrote the first developed comparison of Algeria and Spanish Morocco in August 1936. After explaining the importance of Spanish Morocco to the beginning of the Civil War, Boukhort pointed out how the mayor of Sidi-Bel-Abbès had already visited Franco to give him funds raised in the province of Oran. Boukhort listed the newspapers (including *La Dépêche*) and the politicians that were dedicated to destroying the Popular Front by any means. As a solution, he called for administrative cleansing and the enacting of promised reforms.\(^{254}\) Comparisons continually appeared afterwards: Algerian fascists visited Seville and Melilla with 250,000 francs for the Nationalists,\(^{255}\) anti-Semitism became a tool to gain the sympathy of the *indigènes* for a future uprising,\(^{256}\) and “gros colons” began stocking masses of weapons and counting up the pilots available for a military insurrection (200 in Oranie).\(^{257}\) In October, to prove the fantasies of the Spanish-inspired right, the paper quoted Marcel Gatuing, president of the Oran Croix-de-feu section, who exclaimed at an RNAS meeting:

> As for me, I will issue a call for organization first, and then order an offensive. The Spanish Revolution spilled a lot of blood because it was insufficiently prepared. What is necessary for us then, is a methodical preparation, a well-established organization, and consent to discipline even at the cost of the supreme sacrifice, in order to create a battlefront that Blum’s militia will find unassailable. It is no longer possible today, when throughout the world the old methods and dogmas collapse, to assure the safety of France with laws, decrees, discourse, and voting ballets.\(^{258}\)

Gatuing was not the only extremist who threatened insurrection. In a long series of articles about the fascists in Algeria, George Gallais described the actions of the

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\(^{255}\) *L’Humanité*, “Le complot contre la sureté de l’Etat- 500 mitraillettes sont découvertes chez les fascistes d’Oran” September 19, 1936.

\(^{256}\) *L’Humanité*, “L’Algérie attend le « souffle Républicain »” September 11, 1936.

\(^{257}\) *L’Humanité*, “Les gros colons fascistes de l’Algérie préparent activement la révolte armée” September 25, 1936.

schoolteacher Eugène Rethault, who became a celebrity among the Algerian right after his suspension for publicly threatening the Republic. According to Gallais, Rethault spoke in front of a small RNAS assembly about how “If France sinks into barbarism (leftist revolution), Algeria, which received civilization from her, will cross the sea to bring back that civilization.” While Lambert defended Rethault for his comment “it is necessary to fight” on the grounds that Rethault was referring to struggling for national ideas through legal means rather than initiating an insurrection, he ignored the “civilization” comment.

The PCF and the staff of L’Humanité saw Spain as only part of a greater fascist threat to the Mediterranean. Italy obviously posed a threat since the invasion of Ethiopia heralded an aggressive new policy in the Mediterranean. The Italians began to make overtures to Muslim communities in order to undermine their colonial rivals. When Mussolini visited Libya in March 1937, he proclaimed himself “Defender of Islam”, which the PCF saw as another excuse to bring Muslims closer to France. Yet the Italians also sought to maintain close relations with the extreme right in Algeria. In the fall of 1936, Lambert visited Italy and met Mussolini. A few months later, a journalist from the Italian newspaper La Stampa interviewed Lambert, who praised Fascist Italy and Mussolini, who he called “the true leader of the Mediterranean.” La Stampa idealized Lambert, and noted that he had studied Machiavelli. More alarming for L’Humanité was Lambert’s claim that “With one phone call, I can immediately mobilize 100,000 men.”

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260 L’Echo d’Oran, “A propos de la suspension de M. Rethault” October 14, 1936.
262 Koerner, “L’extrême droite en Oranie”, 589. One is impressed by Lambert’s curiosity. He visited Russia in 1935, Italy in 1936, Spain in 1937, and Germany in 1938. From Lambert’s statements and his interest in new social models, it is clear that he was the classic model of the intellectual fascist who believed that only a radical synthesis of leftist economics and nationalism could save Europe. Koerner even believes that Lambert had national ambitions.
L’Humanité ended its article on Lambert and La Stampa by reminding its readers that an Italian agent by the name of Bassi had established a Fascio Italiano de Mostaganem, where he distributed the funds needed by the RNAS.\textsuperscript{263} George Gallais had already attempted to reveal Bassi’s subversive role. Since Bassi’s business barely stayed afloat while he funded the RNAS, Gallais thought it obvious that he was an agent, though a frustrated one; he allegedly said of the RNAS, “One gives, and gives, and never sees the end of it, and for what?”\textsuperscript{264}

The Nazis first became a factor in the Mediterranean when they joined the Italians in backing Franco. Since German troops and equipment for Spain often came through Morocco, the Nazis established a presence there. The proximity of these German agents to French Morocco and Algeria put the French left on high alert. Under the guidance of Raymond Patenôtre in his brief leftist phase, Le Petit Journal ran an influential series called “Are we Defended” that examined the German threat to the Mediterranean. Le Petit Journal pointed to the Alger-Toulon line as essential to French security and declared (in uppercase letters) that “the Mediterranean is no longer off-limits to the ambitions of the Nazi Reich.”\textsuperscript{265} L’Humanité’s article about Lambert and La Stampa referred to Le Petit Journal’s coverage of the danger of German/Italian cooperation in North Africa.\textsuperscript{266}

The answer to increased foreign propaganda aimed at the indigènes seemed clear to the PCF: reform. One of L’Humanité’s chief writers, P.L. Darnar, equated Popular Front reform in Algeria with the fight against international fascism. Darnar was upset that

\textsuperscript{263} L’Humanité, “La menace fasciste en Algérie” December 11, 1936.
\textsuperscript{264} L’Humanité, ”Comment l’abbé Lambert « réveilla » Mostaganem” November 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{265} Le Petit Journal, December 14, 1936.
\textsuperscript{266} L’Humanité, “La menace fasciste en Algérie” December 11, 1936.
the Mufti assassination had thrown an obstacle in the way of reform, which was effectively a victory for fascists and Hitler. The PCF’s commitments to national defense and Algerian reform were not mutually exclusive according to Darnar, who urged that “We must make of Algeria, of North Africa, and of Islam, a rampart of democracy and the liberty of peoples, rather than abandon it as a zone of formidable agitation-or recruitment-delivered to Hitler’s men.”

The editor-in-chief of *L’Humanité*, Paul Vaillant-Couturier briefly tackled the Algerian problem by comparing it to Alsace, since both regions were areas where the Nazis sought to undermine French rule. Since the PCF leader Thorez had recently received widespread support for his call for Alsatian and French unity, Vaillant-Couturier asked why some were opposing the PCF in Algeria. The recent Nazi call for colonies served as proof for Vaillant-Couturier that the Nazis had designs on Algeria.

Though the PCF and *L’Humanité* effectively demonstrated the radical nature of the Algerian right, they failed to reduce their influence. In fact, the PCF found itself to be under attack from centrists and rightists, who believed the Communists to be associated with Pan-Islam and Algerian nationalism. While the PCF changed course in 1934, there was a long delay in its Algerian sections which turned out to be fatal. The actions of the soon to be expelled André Ferrat came back to haunt the PCF in 1936 and 1937, since the right repeatedly made use of the militantly anti-colonial statements inspired by his policy, exemplified by the Barthel circular. The PCF also could not effectively distance itself from Hadj’s Etoile Nord-Africaine, which enabled the right to associate Communism with Algerian nationalism well after the former had repudiated the latter. In fact, the PCF

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adhered very strictly to the metropolitan Popular Front strategy, which emphasized French security and leftist unity at the expense of more radical left wing elements. By the end of the summer of 1936, the PCF turned against figures like Hadj and Ferrat. The demonstrations and strikes that spread throughout Algeria were very similar in intent and execution to those in France. The particularly violent nature of these events can be partly attributed to the weaker colonial authority over the politically militant leagues. In the end, the rightists and colons convinced the Radicals of their case because the latter thought that the millions of Muslims in Algeria made Popular Front reform far more dangerous. The Radicals believed that they could tentatively work with the PCF at home, but saw no reason to do so in Algeria.

The Communist’s attempt to bring the indigènes into the political system through the Viollette Bill was an essential aspect of their new colonial stance and aimed at consolidating French power and security. Yet it was still too much for those (and there were many) who were wary of allowing the indigènes to assume any political power. As a result, not only did the PCF’s support of a moderate reform fail to ensure the passage of the bill, it contaminated it for the rightists and moderates. The passing of a long-considered bill became equivalent to granting Moscow and its nationalist and Islamic allies a free victory. While the goal of the Algerian rightists and colons was to re-establish the status-quo and reduce the influence of all the new ideologies, the rightists in France saw the Algerian events as a fruitful area in which to attack the PCF. As *Le Matin* pointed out on more than one occasion, the PCF’s actions in Algeria were proof that the entire Popular Front policy of the PCF was a shameless trick. In one opinion piece, *Le Matin* spoke of the PCF’s two languages for France and Algeria. The French language
was patriotic and conciliatory to the Catholics, while in Algeria they cared for nothing but revolution.\textsuperscript{269} For this reason, the rightist Parisian press took advantage of the Algerian situation to undermine the Popular Front at home. Perhaps \textit{La Dépêche Algérienne}’s overreaction to Clichy was inspired by similar goals. If the PCF in France could be proven to openly seek revolution, then the PCF in Algeria must have been after the same thing.

Both in France and in Algeria, the power of press campaigns to construct images of Algeria that adhered to ideological goals was considerable. Though the Algerian right was often extreme, and certainly sympathized with fascist movements, there was no single Algerian political movement that was powerful and truly fascist.\textsuperscript{270} The local elements were more extreme than the metropolitan leaders La Rocque and Doriot, but did not have enough power to spark anything close to an insurrection. Similarly, the PCF had no desire to begin a revolution in Algeria or kick the French out. Yet the great majority of those who read about Algeria saw it in terms of a life and death ideological struggle that had repercussions well beyond Oran and Algiers.

\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Le Matin}, March 18, 1937.
\textsuperscript{270} I base this conclusion from my own research and what little has been written about the Algerian right in the mid to late 1930s. The debate over whether France was generally “immune” to fascism continues, though those that point out the radical tendencies of organizations like the CDF/PSF and PPF often use Algeria as a case in point. A thorough study of the Algerian right could prove that fascist sentiments among the\textit{ colons} was quite powerful, but channeled through too many different parties and organizations. The only element that threatened to develop into a unified, fascist movement was the RNAS under Lambert, who displayed many fascist traits. Yet the RNAS was a grouping of different parties, and the power and influence of the metropolitan PSF and PPF kept Lambert from playing an independent role. While Algerian “fascists” were not unified, they most likely existed in considerable numbers, though much more work needs to be done in this area.
Conclusion

Though the ideas behind the Viollette Bill had been discussed before 1936, only the election of the Popular Front government, with its considerable reforming initiative, provided the bill a serious chance of success. However, the same ambitions that led the Popular Front to embark on colonial reform convinced their opponents that their real goals were reckless at best, and part of a Moscow-directed plot against France at worst. Algeria seemed to be a playground for the two most hated groups of the French right: foreigners and Jews. Right-wingers in France and Algeria thought these groups followed the orders of Moscow and planned to take advantage of the poor social status of the large Muslim population in order to start a revolution. The central reason for xenophobia and anti-Semitism was the perception that leftist ideas had no backing from true Frenchmen. The leftist Algerian civil servants and teachers who came from France were either depicted as not entirely French for their political beliefs or ignorant of the interests of French Algeria, and therefore foreign to Algeria. Widespread paranoia in Algeria would not have been possible if the same fears did not dominate the discourse of the metropolitan right. Moreover, the French preoccupation with dangerous foreigners included Muslim Algerian immigrant workers. Despite the efforts of the PCF and the SFIO, the French increasingly supported measures that racially defined and restricted the movements of North Africans. Press coverage molded and solidified racial ideas, thus supporting the colons’ alternative to the Viollette Bill, which planned to institutionalize racial differences. The newest racial ideas, supported by several key Radicals, predicted that assimilation could occur, but only after centuries. For the colons, assimilation was a goal on the horizon; in sight yet unattainable for the moment. The press campaigns that legitimized the French mission of civilization never defined assimilation beyond the
rejection of the one social structure that the Muslims would not forsake, the personal
status. Comfortable in the knowledge that this requirement would never be fulfilled, the
colons went to work depicting the *indigènes* as a poor, ignorant, and gullible mass easily
manipulated by anti-French forces.

The Algerian right’s response to the Popular Front’s attempt to aid the *indigènes*
borrowed from metropolitan doctrine. Both the PPF and CDF/PSF appealed to the
working classes in France and to Algerian Muslims by promising social amelioration and
protection from exploitative capitalists. However, just as the right fought against stronger
worker organization, they opposed Muslim political empowerment. They argued on
behalf of the indigènes that full citizenship would do little to benefit the Muslim
population, since only 20-25,000 would vote, though they also spread fear among colons
by claiming that the bill would soon be expanded to include all Muslims. All along, the
real focus remained on proposals to improve Muslim living conditions. One of the most
striking features of this campaign was the extreme Algerian brand of anti-Semitism,
which became a tool of the right to attract Muslim supporters. The Algerian right echoed
the anti-Semitic propaganda popular in France and Europe by demonizing local Jews as
economic exploiters and supporters of foreign ideologies. By attacking the Jews, the right
believed they could fight their political enemies while simultaneously posing as the
defenders of the Muslims. While European trends heavily influenced Algerian anti-
Semitic rhetoric, the Algerian CDF/PSF and PPF members actually contributed in
radicalizing the positions of their parties in France. By the end of the Algerian debate,
both parties began to embrace anti-Semitism in France as a result of the uncompromising
nature of their popular and powerful Algerian sections. Overtly fascist symbols also
became a commonplace in Algeria. In the common struggle against the Popular Front and Communists, the Algerian right tended to radicalize the larger parties that they belonged to.

In contrast, the PCF’s Algerian section showed little willingness to stray from the new party line. Maurice Thorez’s theorization of Algeria’s future consistently dictated policy throughout the debate. Time and time again, PCF rhetoric concerning Algeria focused on inter-racial unity and the struggle against fascism. Like the Algerian right, the Algerian left framed its central arguments in the context of the Popular Front. However, while the French right could not control their Algerian members, the PCF clamped down on those who opposed the Popular Front’s Algerian reforms for being too moderate. Radical members like André Ferrat left to advocate total Algerian independence,271 while Messali Hadj’s nationalist Etoile Nord-Africaine became the target of numerous PCF attacks.272 Although the PCF failed in the Viollette Bill, their policy towards Algeria remained the same until the Algerian War of 1954, when Thorez’s ideal of unity confronted the strict Algerian nationalism of the FLN. The PCF’s pro-French Algerian policy was so well established by the events of the late 1930’s that the party was completely unprepared for the outbreak of an anti-colonial and anti-French war.273 With the advent of the Popular Front, parties on both right and left saw the actions of their Algerian members as important to the domestic situation, and made concerted efforts to unify the goals and beliefs of their French and Algerian sections. Both Muslim and French Algerians saw themselves as part of the national ideological struggle. Even in a

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remote southern Algerian village, a local speaking at the burial of the PSF victim Tahar Acherchour compared the latter’s murder to the death of Roger Salengro.274

Yet without the French press, the enmeshing of French and Algerian political interests and conflicts would have been impossible. Since correspondence networks distributed information to and from Paris, and the Parisian press often sent articles to provincial newspapers, the readers of Algerian dailies closely followed Parisian events. Large party organs like *L’Humanité* were even shipped to Algeria. The priority that the French Algerians placed on metropolitan news indicates their eagerness to identify themselves as part of the French nation. It is no surprise then, that Algerians mimicked the political culture of the Popular Front. Political chants, slogans, gatherings, and gestures quickly became popular in Algeria. In order to confirm the importance of Algeria to the ideological struggle, the Algerian right and left attempted to use the Parisian press to convince the *métropole* that the fate of France rested upon Algerian reform. Algerian politicians and experts frequently wrote editorials for Parisian newspapers in the hopes of raising awareness of their cause. The Parisian press reciprocated by printing articles of their own on Algeria, which the provincial Algerian press often reprinted or quoted, so as to show the readers that the French in the *métropole* cared for Algeria. While the Algerian press emphasized that the Algerian debate was part of the greater conflict with the Popular Front in order to bring the *colons* into the French nation, the Parisian press used Algerian events to attack domestic opponents. *L’Humanité* constantly pointed to the strength of French and foreign fascism in Algeria, while newspapers like *Le Matin* viewed the PCF’s presence in Algeria and Popular Front

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reform as a part of a PCF/Moscow based plot against the Republic. Since the interests of the colonial and Parisian press coincided, contradictions were rare. In September 1936, *La Dépêche Algérienne* expressed disapproval of *Le Temps*’ alarmist statements concerning Algeria, and turned around in March 1937 to plead to the métropole that the situation was far worse than imagined.\(^{275}\) Yet such misunderstandings were rare, despite the growing distance between the depiction and reality of Algeria.

Before the Popular Front, the colonial press largely ignored the Muslims. After June 1936, it placed the blame for the Algerian crisis almost entirely on the shoulders of the PCF and leftists. While Hadj’s nationalists received criticism, and the Oulemas’ religious movement engendered concerns, the Muslim movements did not impress the colons, who thought only Communism posed a credible threat. They believed the Muslim movements to be so weak that their only danger resided in their connections to the Communists. The Algerian debate’s focus on the Popular Front struggle between Communism and fascism relegated the Muslims to the background. Each side depicted the Muslim Algerians as either potential tools of their enemies or as loyal allies in the ideological battle. The right and left’s preoccupation with each other in articles about Algeria explains how both failed to correctly measure and understand the first seeds of modern Algerian nationalism.

In the short term, the French press played a large role in the failure of the Viollette Bill. The mobilization of the Algerian right and the colons after the election of the Popular Front created a unified and powerful colonial lobby. Many of the Algerian experts and politicians who played a key role in the opposition to the bill provided

numerous editorials and interviews for Parisian and Algerian newspapers to spread public awareness of its dangers. In Algeria itself, mobilization revolved heavily around politicized newspapers which advocated a plethora of ideological positions. Editorialists seeking the cause of disorder in Algeria often pointed to the effects of press campaigns as an answer. As the newspapers brought Algeria closer to the French political situation, the Viollette Bill looked increasingly risky to all but the Socialists and Communists. Only a few months after Blum introduced the bill, it had essentially died. By the spring of 1937 the Popular Front had lost much of its initiative, and Blum was not eager to put his government on the line for a risky colonial bill. Raoul Aubaud’s declaration that Algeria needed order and authority represented the failure to obtain the necessary Radical support for the bill.

In the face of overwhelming colonial resistance and a press campaign that continually warned of Communist designs on Algeria, the Radicals had little choice but to oppose the bill. The Radicals did not trust the Communists and had little interest in large reforms, especially in an area like Algeria, where the maintenance of colonial authority was the highest priority. Radical deputies in Algeria were among the strongest opponents of the Viollette Bill, and worked with the Algerian right against it. In France, the Radicals opted to work with the Communists to halt the perceived advance of French fascism. In Algeria, the Radicals chose to work with the extreme right because the Communists risked empowering the Muslims, thus placing the entire French colonial structure under stress. The success of the rightist press in depicting an Algerian crisis

caused by ideological beliefs and worsened by the Viollette Bill was essential in shaping the Radical view.

Though the claim that the Viollette Bill was the last realistic chance for France to keep Algeria is debatable, there is no doubt that its failure convinced many Muslims previously sympathetic to France that nationalism was the only way forward. Most of the historiography concerning the Viollette Bill points to the personal status and the power of the colonial lobby as the causes of its defeat. While there is no single answer as to why the reform failed, it is useful to place the debate more firmly in the context of the worldwide crisis of the 1930s. Issues like the personal status, polygamy, and French civilization held sway, and were certainly road-blocks to electoral reform. Yet it is possible that these could have been overcome given a more stable political situation, since the proposed expansion of the electorate was quite small. However, the mixture of French and Algerian politics added an extra level of complexity. The Viollette Bill was no longer just a matter of expanding French citizenship; it was part of a greater ideological struggle that threatened the future of French Algeria and possibly France itself. Close inspection of the Algerian discourse in the French press reveals the extent to which this exaggeration occurred. As the press covered the remarkable Algerian political movement inspired by and modeled after the Popular Front, the debate became increasingly hostile. Although the Viollette Bill had little to do with the left/right struggle, the fact that the Popular Front proposed it allowed the right to associate electoral reform with supposed anti-French Communist plans. It was in this tense and hostile climate, that the Viollette Bill, laboring under the weight of both traditional and ideological rhetoric, collapsed.

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